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ANDROMEDA.

ANDROMEDA.

BY

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AUTHOR OF "A NILE NOVEL," "MIRAGE," "VESTIGIA," ETC., ETC.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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Dedicated to

R. = S.

LONDON,

July 12th, 1882-85.

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ANDROMEDA.



CHAPTER I.

FRIENDS.

It had been raining since early morning in the mountains—a chill heavy July rain. But at twelve o'clock the sky lightened for a little ; at four the mist had closed in again, but the storm was over. The quiet countryside seemed quieter than ever after the cessation of that wild rush of wind and water. The fields looked beaten and sodden ; the brimming glacier torrent made less noise over its stones ; only in the pine woods along the road there was a ceaseless sound

of dropping from the drenched water-soaked trees.

On this hard white highroad a girl and a man were walking together, and away from the village; but not unobserved. The peasants, lounging heavily in the cottage doorways, only looked after them with a steady bovine stare; but three or four of the guides stepped forward and touched their hats as they passed; and one of two young men, who were seated by the open window in one of the whitewashed bedrooms of the small Tyrolese inn, was looking out, and caught sight of them at that moment.

“There goes your Andromeda,” he remarked, taking his pipe out of his mouth, and scattering the ashes upon the immaculate wooden window-ledge. He rose to his feet, stretching his arms with a half-suppressed yawn,—a tall, strongly built young fellow of seven or eight and twenty, with a frank, careless, happy-looking face. The most noticeable features in it were his eyes,

which were indeed extraordinarily blue and keen. Nothing ever escaped them; he seemed to have the faculty of seeing farther and quicker than other men, and much of what he saw amused him, and served to confirm him in his own good opinion of himself.

“I see your Andromeda,” he said, “and with that fellow Clayton. They are going for a walk after the rain; and, for once, I don’t think I can do better than follow in his footsteps. I wish Irwin would come back. It’s the deuce of a bore having to go about alone in this dismal weather. There! they have turned the corner.” He stood silent a moment, continuing to look out of the window. He began to whistle; then broke off suddenly. “I wish she had asked me to take her, instead of that fellow,” he said.

The man at the farther end of the room glanced up from his book with an impatient frown. “I wish you would have the good-

ness, Marlowe, to give Miss Dillon her proper title when you speak of her."

"My dear fellow, I was under the impression you gave her the name yourself! Not that that matters, if you object to it now," said Marlowe, very good-humouredly; "but I thought it was a fair enough illustration of your usual romantic, quixotic, and altogether un-English fashion of judging a very commonplace love affair. To you Miss Dillon represents, or represented, a modern Andromeda, chained to the rock of an impossible engagement, and dependent altogether upon the intervention of high Heaven and a Perseus for release. Now, to the rest of us, she is simply a nice girl—an uncommonly nice girl, I'll admit—who, for no particular reason, means to marry a man with no particular attractions or cleverness. If I were a girl, I'll be hanged if I would marry Clayton! But—a clever woman and a fool—surely 'tis no new thing to wonder at? But that is just what I mean, Richard,

by your taking the foreign point of view. You foresee dramatic disaster, and disappointment, and the Lord knows what all, when the rest of us are aware of only the most commonplace average marriage. You can't help it. I suppose the world *can't* look the same to a man with Latin blood in him."

The man addressed as Richard—his real name was Riccardo San Donati, Marchese of San Donato, the small fishing village on the south coast near Spezia ; and he was head of the family as well, master of the Piedmontese estate and of the old empty palace at Turin ;—an Italian by birth, and by education too, although it was difficult enough to realize this at first on hearing his perfect English ;—San Donati, then, looked down again at his book. " Well, well ; a man only sees with his own eyes, when he can see at all," he said, sharply. " Whenever you have shown yourself particularly obtuse, Nevil, I observe that you glory in the fact, and

denounce other people for having Latin blood in them. But there is no depending upon you or your moods. You remind me of an Australian boomerang in your constitutional incapacity for straight and consistent lines. For my part, I prefer having human relations with human creatures. It may be shorter to ticket them off-hand in your fashion, but I doubt if it is a more reliable mode of classification. I know it is not so interesting."

He spoke with a certain amount of irritation, but Nevil standing by his window, only laughed.

"Oh, for your part, my dear fellow, you are an idealist. Each man to his trade; and you—why, you are a poet!"

Richard's pale face flushed. He was only about a year older than Nevil Marlowe, but with a far more striking countenance. His face, in repose, wore a look of extreme and settled melancholy. There was nothing complaining or even bitter in its expression,

but it was always a face in shadow, a face with a cloud upon it. His head was remarkably high and narrow, and unusually straight at the back, going into his neck like the head of a Greek statue. His hair was dark and fine and curly, above a high and noble forehead. His nose was long and delicate, and very finely modelled ; his lips thin but flexible, and with a great sweetness in their smile. He wore neither beard nor moustache ; and his thin colourless cheeks were a little sunken, as if with much pain or much watching. His dark heavy-lidded eyes had the same expression of weariness, and an immutable self-control. Altogether, it was a very peculiar and very individual countenance, the face of an aristocrat and a thinker. The dark cloak which was thrown over the back of his chair fell across his shoulders with a *faux air* of statuesque drapery ; and there was a sufficient suggestion of something intensely observant and yet remote—of something alien and yet

attractive—about his whole personality, to give a sound of plausibility to Nevil's epithet.

“A poet?” San Donati repeated. “A poet! well, that's soon said. And yet a poet, as I take it, is little more than a man who finds the real significance, the real value of life, in its emotions. We express what you feel, *vous autres*. Or rather, we feel it too, we passionately feel it; we understand, we comment upon life: and you—you possess it.” His pale broad forehead contracted; the deep lines between his eyes seeming suddenly to add ten years to his age. “You know that last thing I wrote, Nevil,—the ‘Ricordanze?’ Well, I had a letter about it, from the publisher, while you were away. He says that nothing so popular has been done since Giusti. He says half the songs have been set to music already—the boys whistle the tunes in the streets. That's pleasant, isn't it? And there is not one of those boys,—there is not one of my own fishermen

down there at the old village, who look upon me as a sort of earthly Providence, an embodiment of all that is rich and powerful and great,—there is not one of those miserable, dirty, nameless, penniless wretches who would consent to change places with me—with me, their lord and master, mind you !—if such a thing were possible this day.”

“ My dear Richard,—my dear old Dick ! ” cried Marlowe, turning away from the window, a look of great affection and pain upon his handsome sunburned face.

“ I tell you, Nevil, there has been an idle young ruffian lounging in that doorway, over there, all the morning,—a common guide, with nothing to do but stare at the rain and curse it for interfering with his day’s work : I had been watching him when you came in just now—the way he stood and moved about. There was a farmer’s cart drove down the street, loaded with sacks of grain. One of them slipped from its fastening ; and that fellow over there sprang up, out of

pure idleness, and caught it in his arms as it fell. And as I lay here and looked at him doing it, I swear to you, Marlowe, I would have given my very soul to have stood in his place—to have been able to do as much.” He broke out into a wild laugh. “You see, I say my soul, old Nevil. ’Twould be but a shabby speculation to have offered to stake my body.”

“Dick, Dick, my dear old boy !”

“I don’t often treat you to a scene like this, do I, Marlowe? Do me justice. It is not often I complain. But there is something in this place—or in this cursed weather——” He rolled his head restlessly from side to side. “Do you remember my making a fool of myself, in this same fashion, years and years ago, at Turin? It was one wet winter afternoon, when you and Gina were running races in the old picture gallery—do you remember? I was trying to copy a dog in one of the pictures—a white dog; I could draw it now. At last Gina would not play

any more, and you quarrelled, and then she kissed you to make it up. I remember thinking that I never quarrelled with her—and she never kissed me. And then you both went out into the snow to feed your rabbits. How many years ago is it, Nevil? I never forgot that afternoon. *What a miserable little beggar I was!*”

“I remember perfectly. And how we quarrelled again over the rabbits, Gina and I. She would have them all for her own,—and served me right for a selfish little brute.”

“*How* I envied you that afternoon, old Nevil! I was sick, sick to my very soul with longing and grief.” He threw up one of his hands and clutched at the cloak hanging behind him. “And that must be twenty years ago now—twenty years.” He lay back in his chair, perfectly silent for several minutes; gradually the lines about his forehead and mouth relaxed.

When Marlowe looked up, he caught his

friend's eye watching him with an air of faint amusement.

"Why don't you go out for your walk, my boy? It is dull work for you, sitting here all day," Richard said very kindly. "You needn't be afraid of leaving me. See, the storm is past. The paroxysm is over. Go and have your walk, Nevil. If you will give me an arm when you come back, I will try if I can hobble out as far as the balcony."

"Try it now," said Marlowe, jumping up eagerly. "Never mind my walk. Give me your arm, and let me take you out there now. You can sit in the air, and I'll go and ask the other Miss Dillon, Miss Agatha, to come and talk to you." And then, as the other man only shook his head, "Now, this is sheer malingering, Richard," he said, half provoked, and yet half laughing. "I don't believe in that sprain of yours. Come now. You took advantage of my being away to go out and half kill yourself: that

is all very well ; but the question is, how did you do it ?”

For the second time, San Donati's pale face changed colour. “Oh, in me you behold the typical Arcadian, my dear Nevil,” he said lightly. “While you climb mountains, I indulge in pastoral pursuits and simple rural pleasures, such as gathering flowers. I was getting some flowers by the rocks up there”—he nodded in the direction of the window,—“and I slipped and fell. Nature, you see, my dear boy, has not intended me for a frequenter of lofty places, and when I forget myself she is good enough to remind me of the fact.”

“Oh, I see. So you were getting flowers,” Marlowe repeated slowly, and fixing his eyes upon the other's flushed face. “And—these flowers—they were for Miss Dillon, I suppose ?”

San Donati leaned a little forward in his chair, and stared back at him without

moving a muscle. "Those flowers, as you justly suppose, were intended for Miss Dillon."

"Ah!" said Marlowe, with an air of deliberation.

He got up and strolled over to the window, and stood there for a moment with his hands in his pockets, staring at the long white road. The inn was built at the extreme end of the village street. Beyond, was the narrow green Alpine valley, dark woods, wet fields: the mountains were all covered; only here and there, where the mist had lifted, one saw a dull white streak of snow.

"Well, she is a nice girl," said Marlowe, turning round abruptly.

He took up a book from the table in the middle of the room; opened it; glanced at it absently, then flung it down again with an expression of disgust.

"Dick, don't be angry with me, old boy; but I do think that a good half of what you

fancy about yourself is a gross exaggeration, I do indeed. I swear I do. Why, look here," he went on impulsively, and never lifting his eyes from the table-cloth before him : "of all the men I know, who is the cleverest, the kindest, the best all round, the man who has fought against the strongest odds and shown most talent ? You sneer at your own success. Very well. Perhaps that's only natural. But I wish you could understand for once how other people speak of you—what they think of you. I wish—the other day, before I left, you know—I wish you could have heard Miss Dillon——"

Richard would have interrupted him ; but he lifted his hand, and went on rapidly and without giving the other time to speak. "As for that—that other matter," he said in a lower voice, "why, hang it all, man ! it isn't as if—as if—as if you were really disabled, you know. Why, Richard, five hundred other fools with backs as straight as mine, are just about fit to make into a

common regiment of soldiers ; while you—
with your brains—and your name—and
your money——”

“And my shoulder ! Don’t forget my
crooked shoulder. Oh, I’m different enough.
I’m distinguished enough, God knows !”

“You are different enough from your
usual self when you take to talking such
morbid rubbish. What, in Heaven’s name,
is the use of being so perverse ? Now,
I ask you !” Nevil retorted, with a sudden
blaze of anger.

But at this the other man began to laugh
again in somewhat bitter fashion, holding
out his hand to his friend, and begging him
to be patient a little longer with all un-
reasonableness. “I’ve had nothing else to
think of, for this last fortnight while you
were away, Nevil. And you have spoiled
me with kindness. I am growing unfit to
live alone, and that’s a fact,” he continued,
lying back on his cushions and contemplating
the young fellow opposite with an air of

extreme affection and kindness. "And you are quite right; I am not my usual self at all. You have guessed the secret, lad; it wasn't much of a mystery, was it? I am——" He hesitated for an instant; then he said very slowly, "I am as much in love with that little girl out there as a man can well be. In love with her? why, the word signifies nothing! I can't explain to you what I mean. She has become a necessity to me, like the air I breathe. When I hear her voice, or her laugh,—did you ever notice how she laughs, Nevil?—I think no other woman has a voice like hers. When I hear it under that window, it is—as if the day was breaking in my heart. My heart? do you know, Nevil, there have been days this last fortnight when the craving for her has been like a physical pain to me, and I have felt my heart flutter and strain like some miserable broken-winged bird!" He looked up at his friend with passionate miserable eyes. "I rave. *Mais*

que voulez vous? It is the Latin blood, you know, old fellow !”

“Dear old Dick, I was afraid of something of this sort,” said Marlowe, blankly.

“If she were marrying some one else—any one else,—I’ve been thinking I could have borne it better if even you had fallen in love with her, Marlowe. But that fellow—that Clayton, a nonentity, the solemn empty semblance of a man !—why, he’s like—he’s like a candle without a wick : he *may* melt ; he can never burn.”

“Well, but hang it all ! she’s not married to him yet ! Why don’t you give the poor girl a chance to find out her own mind ? Why don’t you speak to her, Richard ? We call it an engagement, you know,” said Marlowe, getting up again and beginning to walk about the room, “but do you know anything definitely about it ? *I* don’t. What a pity Irwin isn’t here ; he’d find out everything for you in ten minutes. I never knew such a beggar for getting at

information. Why, Dick, what are you thinking of, not to ask her yourself? If I were half as much in love with any woman as all that, I'd give her a dozen chances of saying, 'No, thank you!' before I felt quite certain she knew what she lost by refusing."

"Ah yes; *you!*" murmured Richard, pushing aside the cloak which covered the back of his chair. It fell to the ground in a dark heap. He thrust it aside with his foot, and rose to his feet slowly, steadying himself by the edge of the table. When he stood up it was apparent that one of his shoulders was higher than the other; but, as Marlowe had told him, it was disfiguring—it hardly amounted to a deformity.

He stood up, holding on to the table with his white long beautifully shaped hands. "That's better; isn't it? Oh, I dare say I shall be all right again now, in a day or two. But it was an awkward twist while it lasted." He rested one hand affectionately upon the

other man's shoulder. "I dare say I shall get as far as the balcony to-night. And now, just help me over to the writing table, like a good fellow, and—— Halloo! How do you do, Lord Irwin?"

This last inquiry was addressed to a young thickset man, with dark hair and moustache, and a pleasant ugly face, who had flung the door open after giving it one loud knock.

"How do, San Donati? Glad to see you on your feet again," he said, coming in, and looking all about the room. He stared hardest of all at his cousin, who immediately began to laugh. "*You* want your hair cut," Lord Irwin remarked placidly.

"I say, Irwin, I thought you were somewhere near Innsbrick, fishing?"

"Then, if you were right, I have apparently returned. And now, how is everybody? I see San Donati is all right again, but how is everybody else? Are the Dillons still here?"

“Surely.”

“Then I am glad of that, for Miss Agatha Dillon is the most charming old lady I know. When you two fellows have done writing poetry, I want Nevil to come out for a walk. Do you always let him smoke while he is doing his sonnets, San Donati? I should think it would interfere with the rhymes. I say, Nevil, wait until you see the new girl downstairs.”

“What new girl?”

“I brought her with me in the Eil-wagen. Or, rather, she brought us, her mamma and myself. You never saw anything so pretty. American; with eyelashes that long. She has been spending a month in London, and knows more smart people there than you or I ever heard of. You never saw such a pretty creature in your life. Their name is Armitage, and they come from a place, a town or something, called Brooklyn. It's near New York. And the mother is nearly as good-looking as the daughter, only she

doesn't talk. She spoke only twice all the way. Once she asked me if I were my father's eldest son ; and once she mentioned a Salviati chandelier thing they have been looking at in Venice. She said, 'I wish we had bought the pink and blue one, with the gas laid on through it ; it would look so cunning in your pawpaw's office.' "

"You have now," said Marlowe, "described the ideal of my existence. What did you say is the exact measurement of her eyelashes ? "

They went out together, laughing ; Richard could hear their voices on the staircase. He pushed aside the heap of papers which lay before him, and rested his elbows on the table, and his head on his hands. He was watching the empty road.

CHAPTER II.

ONE WAY OF LOVE.

THREE miles or so up the valley the road takes a sudden turn. A deep ravine crosses it, spanned by a military bridge of square and solid masonry. Far below, half hidden by the overhanging larches, a brown trout stream goes rushing down between the fallen boulders, all green with dripping moss and fern, to throw itself into the wide ice-green ice-cold glacier torrent, which, at this point, comes sweeping down the valley between dark serried ranks of pine. Then the high-road takes its sharp turn to the right, and winds in and out between the hills and the deep solitary blue lakes ; past the scattered

villages; through miles and miles of dark heathery uplands; and always steadily descending in long smooth white curves, until, somewhere about Botzen, it strikes once more the level of civilization and trains.

A young girl was standing on this bridge, with her hands resting upon the parapet, looking down at the brown foaming water. This was Clare Dillon.

"Are you not afraid of catching cold?" her companion demanded presently.

She shook her head without speaking, and without changing the direction of her gaze.

"But people do catch cold. You, yourself, you are afraid of nothing, I know; you imagine nothing can hurt you. But, if you remember, you had quite a chill last week; the day we took that long walk with your sister."

"Then I don't remember it," she said calmly.

She leaned a little more forward, resting her elbows on the parapet, and playing with

a loose wet bunch of freshly gathered rhododendron. Her dress was of some dark close-fitting stuff, and she wore a round dark hat, like a boy's. There was no touch of colour about her, except in the vivid rosy flowers and her shining golden hair.

Clayton looked at her, but the air of the ravine was sharp. He buttoned his coat closer, and put his hands in his pockets, and began to shiver.

"Do come. I know you will catch cold," he persisted.

"As you please."

But when they had walked on a few paces, "Do you always expect to get exactly your own way in the world, Mr. Clayton?" she asked suddenly, looking up at him with a certain quiet scrutiny.

Now that he had carried his point, the young man's face cleared again. "You mean that I am obstinate. Well, I wasn't born in Cornwall for nothing." He put up his hand and stroked his fair thin mous-

tache, glancing at her the while with large pale blue eyes, which seemed to have the faculty of changing their colour from dark to light with every change of their owner's expression. Indeed his whole face had more or less of this shifting character, and turned vacuous or handsome, determined or sulky, as the case might be, a dozen times in the course of an afternoon. "But I did not come out on this horrible day to talk about myself, Clare."

"Did you not? I think it is a very nice day. I like the cool air. I like those low hurrying dark clouds and the flying mist. I like those wet woods. If I were alone I should go and stand under the trees, and listen to the great branches dripping."

"I did not come out, I say, to talk only about myself. Clare, when are you going to give me an answer to my question?"

"Mr. Clayton, unless we walk fast we shall be late for supper, and my sister will be anxious about me."

“Clare! when are you going to tell me that you will be my wife?” He had taken one of her gloved hands in his. She looked down at it, but she made no effort to draw it away; her fingers rested passively in his grasp. She was standing quite near him in the middle of the muddy road; on either side of them stretched the darkening wood, but just at this point there was a break, a few yards of mossy turf; the cart-ruts were full of water, and reflected the lighter patches of sky.

She raised her eyes to his face; they were large clear intelligent eyes, but there was no emotion expressed in their calm straightforward glance, beyond an air of vague pity.

“I wish you would not speak of this,” she said.

“I must speak of it. I shall speak of it. Good Heavens, how is one ever to understand a woman! Why it will matter to me all my life long what you answer. And

you know it. And you tell me not to speak of it! Do you take me for a boy, to let myself be silenced now, and in this fashion, Clare?

She made no answer for a moment. Then she dropped her eyes and gave a quick short sigh.

“I am so sorry, Mr. Clayton.”

“I don’t ask you to be sorry. I only ask you to remember how long I have loved you. You have always known that I loved you.”

She shook her head imperceptibly.

“Clare, don’t make me miserable! What am I to do with myself if I lose you? No, I cannot,”—he tightened his grasp upon her passive fingers,—“I will not let you go!”

“I am so sorry,” she repeated very gently. She would have drawn her hand away, but he caught it back again with some inarticulate exclamation. “Ah, you liked me better once!” he said bitterly.

“I liked you better once——”

She hesitated, and looked away across a field, to where a solitary pine swayed heavily in the wind, relieved darkly against the lowering clouds. She had no wish to speak of this matter further; it did not touch her; it was merely irksome to her; but silence at this especial moment might have been unjust. Clare Dillon had a great desire for justice. “If you had asked me to marry you sooner—last year, when my father died—I might have answered differently,” she said slowly; “for I was very grateful to you for your kindness then. I am grateful still, but it all seems a hundred years away. And now—— See, Mr. Clayton, it is three months, isn’t it? since you asked me to consider this question? Well, I have considered it.”

“You let me come here,” Clayton urged reproachfully. His hands were trembling a little as he kept nervously buttoning and unbuttoning the top button of his coat.

"You were willing I should come here, Clare——"

But at that her face flushed. She drew back quickly, lifting her eyebrows a little with a certain air of distaste. "Ought we to recriminate?" she asked very quietly. "I let you come here; yes. But was it not you yourself who asked—who—who insisted upon my doing so? Why spoil all the past as well? Indeed, Mr. Clayton, in this you are not generous."

"Generous? What has this to do with generosity? But say that you will marry me; you'll find me generous enough."

"Never; never."

"But you say, yourself, that you liked me once."

"I liked your kindness; I was grateful for it."

"Well, I would be kind to you still."

He would have taken her hand again, but she drew it back with an unmistakable air of decision. "I think it would be better if

we spoke no more of this, and went home. Mr. Clayton, I wish you would take me home to Agatha."

He acquiesced with a sort of sulky formality. He walked by her side, but without speaking. Gradually the dark evening closed in about them; a few slow drops of rain began to fall. As they drew near, the first lamps were being lighted in the village.

"It is late," Clare remarked softly. She glanced up at her companion's face. "You know how difficult it is for me to put things into words, to express what I feel. Yet I am sorry. I am sorry. I wish you would believe it, Mr. Clayton. Indeed I wish you would,

He gave a short laugh. "Sorry? I dare say you are. I'm sorry enough myself, as far as that goes. Well, I've always had bad luck since I can remember."

"It would have been such a mistake—such a mistake," she said very gently and deprecatingly.

“Would it? I suppose every one looks at these things from one’s own point of view. It wouldn’t have been a mistake for me: I don’t know much about the rest of it. Here is the inn. And I shall leave you here, if you will allow me. You’ll excuse me from seeing you up the stairs.”

He was turning away, but the girl put out her hand and stopped him.

“Surely,” she said, “surely, Mr. Clayton, you must see, yourself it was better I should tell you the exact truth? Is it my fault if I cannot care for you as you would have me? We have been good friends,” she said rather sadly. “Because of the old kindness, surely—surely you do not mean to leave me like this?”

A time came when she was very glad to remember those words of conciliation, although they served little enough at the moment; for, without answering, and merely giving her one last glance of love and despair and bitter obstinate resentment, the

young man turned sharply away, and disappeared down the dimly lighted village street.

Clare's face grew troubled. She looked down at her gloved hands, rubbing them slowly together. She stood motionless for a minute or two, with her little fair head drooping; then she turned, and slowly went up the stair. There was no one at that hour in the passages. She opened the door of her own bedroom and went in. A candle was burning upon the chest of drawers between two large bunches of Alpine flowers.

"Is that my Clare?" a voice said, as she closed the door behind her.

"It is I, Agatha."

A beautiful old lady, with thick shining grey hair cut short about her neck, and a very peaceful noble face, came forward and stood in the doorway between the two rooms. "You are late, my dear one. Did you go far? Are you tired?"

"I am very tired," said Clare, smiling

faintly, and seating herself on the edge of the bed. She put up her hand, and drew her sister's fingers caressingly down across her hot cheek. "Agatha."

"Yes, dear?"

"There are so many things that are difficult to decide; even to understand."

"What sort of things do you mean, dear one?"

"Oh, all the world!" said Clare, springing up, and throwing off her hat. She laid both hands upon her sister's shoulders, and looked straight into her eyes, and kissed her. "You are good, Agatha. What! are you already dressed? Then I shall not be ready for supper."

"You have over-tired yourself," the elder woman repeated, looking fondly and anxiously at the girl's flushed and downcast face.

"Oh no," said Clare. "We only went as far as the stone bridge, you know; where the road turns, by the river."

When she was alone, she still sat there, looking down at her gloved hands as they rested upon her lap. "It was impossible," she was saying to herself. "Impossible. Impossible."

CHAPTER III.

IN WHICH RICHARD MAKES AN APPEAL.

At supper, Lord Irwin and the beautiful Miss Armitage were sitting together, extremely happy, and talking unutterable nonsense.

“So you have been to Oxford? Oh yes, I know Oxford,” the young girl was saying, with a charming smile, in a particularly clear voice. “What struck me the most in Oxford—as an intelligent foreigner, you know—was the length of the days in summer, and the extraordinary ignorance of the undergraduates. And it seemed the more surprising, because, with those endless twilights, don’t you see? one would suppose they had time to learn everything.”

"So they would," Lord Irwin answered gravely, "if it wasn't for the proctors. You have no idea how the proctors disturb one. But you mustn't say that all 'Varsity men are ignorant, Miss Armitage. There's my cousin over there, now,—he is no end of a clever fellow."

"Is that your cousin looking at us—the young man with the blue eyes?"

"Yes. There is not much family likeness, is there? I consider it very unfair he should have all the good looks of the family as well as the brains. They say—the people who know—that he is the image of the first Earl Kay, my father's eldest brother, don't you know, who was killed in the Crimea, poor little beggar!"

"But your father's eldest brother must have been your own uncle."

"Naturally."

"Then I don't consider 'poor little beggar!' a respectful way of describing one's own uncle," Miss Armitage observed, with

severity, giving him a quick bright glance, and putting up her hand to pat her wonderful braids of hair.

Irwin laughed. "Well, you see, he wasn't so old as I am now. And it was before I was born : you can't expect me to be overcome with sorrow, now, can you ? I say, Miss Armitage, what is the respectful American way of speaking of one's uncles ?"

"Oh, we don't have them. We never go back so far. In America, a man has to be the father of his own fortunes ; he isn't expected to provide other relations. Now let us talk of something else. We've dismissed your uncle and your cousin. Now you are a hereditary legislator, are you not ?"

"I've been told so."

"Now, this is interesting. Now, for example, what do you do when you are—legislating ?"

"Well, I'll tell you : I go yachting."

"And when you are not yachting ?"

"I shoot. But I never waste my time ; I only shoot when I'm not yachting."

"And your clever cousin, does he go shooting with you ?"

"Nevil ? oh, he does most things. He paints a little. And then he spends a great deal of his time abroad."

"Why ?"

"Well, I don't know exactly. I never asked him. I suppose he likes it—the pictures and stuff. And then, when he was a boy, he used to spend all his holidays in Turin, at my father's ; my father was stationed there for years. I think Nevil got a liking for that sort of life. His greatest friend is an Italian. Perhaps you may have heard of him ? I mean the Marchese San Donati."

She shook her pretty head.

"Oh, I say. You must have heard of him. He writes."

"I'm as ignorant as an undergraduate, Lord Irwin. What is he like ?"

“Well, you can see for yourself. He is sitting nearly opposite you, next to Nevil. There, he is leaning forward to speak to Miss Dillon. It’s a curious face, isn’t it? He looks—different somehow; as if he had lived about forty years ago; but lots of foreigners give one that impression. I don’t know him very well myself, but my cousin tells me he is one of the best fellows one can meet. And old Nevil is generally right. I wish you would let me introduce Nevil to you, Miss Armitage? He would amuse you; he really would.”

She gave him another glance of her brilliant audacious eyes. “So do you; you amuse me very much,” she said demurely. She put her hand up to smooth the laces about her throat, and all her great diamond rings flashed in the lamplight. “What a queer bare pleasant little place this is!” she said suddenly, turning her head from side to side like a bird, and staring at the whitewashed walls of the

salle. There were some chamois skulls and horns nailed up over the white glazed porcelain stove in one corner, and Miss Armitage rustled over to where they were hanging, and touched them daintily with the tip of one white finger. "Is that the sort of thing you shoot? Is it really a pleasure? Do you always sit here in the evening? Mamma, I was telling Lord Irwin that I am going to have a chair taken out for me upon the balcony. Lord Irwin wants to talk to me about—legislation."

Her moving had been a signal for every one to get up. They stood in little groups of twos and threes, talking, for a few minutes, and then, one after another, the men strolled out to read the papers and smoke their evening pipes. At the end of half an hour there was no one left in the long, light, whitewashed room, but Clare and the Marchese San Donati.

. She was sitting by the side table, holding a book. Her eyes were fixed upon its pages,

but she was not reading. She was only vaguely conscious of the movements of the two stout smiling white-sleeved peasant girls whose business it was to see after the comfort of the dozen guests. She saw them pass to and fro, bringing in high shining piles of clean plates, which they deposited with much unnecessary clatter and precision on the centre of the long table, with a view to the morrow's meal. When they left the room she even answered their "good-night" mechanically. But as the hours passed, that scene upon the bridge was growing much more significant to her. While she was listening, out there in the wet dark evening, to Clayton, what he said had seemed to her as arbitrary and isolated as a dream. When he was with her, her own character was so much the stronger of the two, his most urgent words seemed to take no hold upon her.

But the memory of the words remained. Recalled, away from the immediate presence

of his weakening personality, they appeared to acquire a new force, new importance. As she sat there, she was vividly living over again her own part in their past acquaintance. She saw the old house at home on a summer afternoon, and her father coming in, bareheaded, from the garden, and the young man following him a little stiffly, but with an expectant smile in his pale large eyes. In that same autumn the old squire died. Perhaps it was the shock of that death, which served to make all that past time so far off and visionary? As she had said to Clayton, it all seemed a hundred years away. She laid her book down upon her knee, rubbing her hands together gently. She could not rid herself of the impression of still feeling the cold stones of the bridge, up there, in the dark under the trees, above the noisy torrent.

She gave a great start, and let the book fall to the ground, as San Donati crossed the room at length, and came and stood beside her.

“ Ah, it is *you* ! ” she cried softly, looking up with a little air of relief. They were good friends, and she gave him her hand, smiling. “ I did not see you ; I did not know that you were there. But I am so glad that you are better,” she said very kindly.

She had forgotten, then, that he had spoken to her during supper ! Richard’s heart gave a pang at the thought, but he said nothing, only looking down in her perplexed face with an even closer attention. Perhaps this scrutiny disturbed her ; for she rose, almost instantly, and would have passed by him with a simple “ good-night,” had not the young man stopped her ; begging her most earnestly to be seated again, not to go for another few minutes.

“ You know that to-morrow you will be away all day ; Nevil has told me you have promised to join the climbing party,” he said, smiling, “ and I shall not see you until evening. I never see you alone.”

“But you have been ill ; you have been living in your own room,” Clare answered, wondering.

“Ah, yes. I have been alone, and I have had time for a great deal of thinking. Should you think me impertinent if I told you that much of that thought has been about you ? Surely friends have a right to think of one another ? and we, Miss Dillon, we have always been good friends.”

“Surely.”

“Then, as your friend, will you allow me to ask you one question ? Will you answer it ?”

She looked up at him ; his eyes, ordinarily so sombre and sunken, were fixed upon her face with an expression of such indescribable confidence and affection, that, of a sudden, she lost every vestige of embarrassment and surprise. She looked at him as simply as a child. “Yes,” she said. “Oh, yes ; I will answer your questions.”

"You are very good to me. I want to know if I am wrong in supposing that you have had something to vex you, to perplex you, to-day?"

"You are not wrong."

"And it—it was this afternoon—while you were walking."

Clare flushed ; she looked at him without answering.

He took a turn up and down the room, pressing his hands together irresolutely. He came and stood before her.

"Oh, my child!" he said, "do not be angry with me if I tell you to be careful. You do not know what you are doing. You do not know what you are throwing away. You have every right to be angry with me, but I entreat you only to listen. That man can never satisfy you ; you would weary of him in a month. Do not be angry, but listen. What you see of good in him is a mere reflection. In himself he is nothing. He can become nothing. If

you marry him you give yourself for nothing. Clare ! that man has no worth but inso-much as he loves you."

"Yes ; he does love me," she said.

"But how ? as a boy cares for his new plaything, because it is his to break it when he pleases. Child, love is the supreme good of life, but the supreme necessity is—liberty. The first requires good fortune ; it is not given to all of us. But, thank heaven ! to hold the last, needs only a brave heart. I—I myself, who speak to you——"

There was a water-bottle and an empty tumbler standing on the table before him. He leaned over, and filled up the glass ; the bottle trembled in his hand and clicked. As he moved, his shadow, grotesquely exaggerated, copied his action upon the whitewashed wall.

"One can never hope to answer the puzzle of life," he said, "but courage and good faith may carry one past it. I—what right have I—to attempt to judge of your

motives? What right have I to influence you? You can only listen to me out of your exquisite goodness, and because I am as I am, and therefore privileged, and not to be tried by the same standards as other men."

He spoke rapidly, bitterly, with a gathering force of emotion. His face had turned white to the lips; and, on the wall, the shadow stood behind him. Clare turned her eyes away from it. She looked anywhere else—at the empty tables, the shining, solid piles of plates—anywhere about the white empty room.

"If you are different from other men, you have reason to be proud of it—you have your art," she said tremulously.

"Ay, my art. And art,—if it doesn't console one,—at least, it often makes life possible. Work bridges over the broken years. Do you think, then, I am not grateful for it? And—and—oh, Clare, Clare! what is art to me, or life—how am

I to live, if I must need stand by and see you wreck and squander yourself? And I to stand by—helpless !”

He gave her a glance so charged with wild appeal and misery that she never afterwards entirely lost the memory of that look. It was like a sudden revelation—a revelation and a confession in one, and the convincing vision of another existence.

Her eyes grew slowly dark and suffused with tears. She said, “I thought that I had not altogether the right to speak of it. I am not going to marry Mr. Clayton. I cannot. I have told him so to-night.”

He drew a long, deep, gasping breath of relief and satisfaction. “Thank God—I thank God !” he said, huskily.

He let himself fall into a chair. Her hand was resting on the back of it. He turned and looked at her. After a moment he bent his head, and just touched with his lips the fingers of the little hand.

“I did not mean to tell you, Clare ; and

yet why not? Why should you not know it? It cannot hurt you to know that there is, *de par le monde*, one more man who loves you. Clare, it does not pain you that I should tell you so? Other men will tell you the same thing often enough in the years to come; but the years pass—I sometimes think love passes whether we would or no,—the world is full of broken and forgotten joys. And I, who am different” —he smiled at her with a fond, patient smile,—“I, who am different, Clare, from other men, I can be unlike them, too, in this. ’Tis a little thing to say that my life is yours, to do what you like with it. But I am yours when you need me. If I cannot give you joy, I may some day give you comfort; and at least you will allow me to believe that, and suffer me to devote what I am and what I yet may be to your dear service.”

She would have answered something; but he hushed her, smiling, and went on speaking,

with that strange pale look of rapture still on his face.

“Do you know that in all my life I have never spoken of love to any woman? I was keeping it for you. Some time, when we are old old friends, little Clare, when you are married and I see your children playing about you—some quiet day you will have patience to listen; and when you know what my life has been, you will understand better what you yourself have become to me. I stand apart; but I have known you. I think it is like one of the old stories, Clare: the visions were vouchsafed to those to whom the world gave nothing, and Heaven opens before the eyes of men who live in desert places.”

He had taken her little hand in his while he was speaking, and now he waited, holding it, while the tall clock in the corner began whirring noisily, preparatory to striking ten. He waited until the last harsh stroke had died away into silence, and then he rose.

"You must not sit up later, child. You have to get up so early to be off for your climb in the morning," he said, in quite another voice, and looking down at her fondly. "But, before I go"—his face flushed; he stood there smiling, reddening, conscious, looking a dozen years younger than was his wont,—"I have a great favour to ask of you. I want you, once, to call me by my name; say, 'Good night, Richard.' I know it is presumptuous—foolish; but what would you have? It is my *idée fixe*."

Clara, too, had risen. She was very pale and very grave.

"Will you wait until to-morrow night—until I come back from that walk? I must think. I do not know." She turned her head abruptly away; her face wore an expression of trouble. "Here; I will speak to you here, to-morrow night," she murmured.

San Donati could not repress a violent start.

"Assuredly. All shall be as you please,"

he said, after an instant's hesitation. But no effort could control the tremor of his voice or extinguish the dawning light of expectation and rapture in his eyes as he moved forward to open the door for her. She did not offer him her hand, nor did he ask for it. When she had left him he went back to his place by the table, and threw himself down on the nearest chair, covering his face with his hands.

She passed Nevil Marlowe on the narrow staircase. He had his hat on, and was running down, whistling cheerily. He stopped, short at sight of her, and uncovered his head.

"Oh, Miss Dillon! Excuse me, but have you by any chance seen San Donati? I cannot find him."

"He is — downstairs — in the dining-room," Clare said slowly. To her own astonishment she seemed to find a certain difficulty in speaking.

She nodded her head, and went quickly past him, up the stair.

CHAPTER IV.

CLARE.

THEY started a little after four o'clock in the morning. Lord Irwin had persuaded Miss Armitage to make one of their party, and her light incessant laugh sounded in that morning freshness more than ever like the carolling of a bird. Marlowe told her of it presently, when some accident of the steep pathway had thrown them near together, but she only laughed again.

“Are you and Lord Irwin the early worms then? Poor worms!” she retorted scoffingly. She headed the little line of climbers with an elastic and untiring step.

It was a purely radiant morning. Very

small round clouds floated extremely high up above the circling rim of mountain peaks ; they were still slightly tinged with rose colour along their edges, and all the eastern part of the sky was of a warmer palpitating hue. The snowy summits looked farther away than they would do a few hours hence—more removed from the common world of men ; and the wet dark pines drooped their heavy branches, motionless, as if still half conscious of the night. Everywhere the young sunbeams shone upon a glistening surface of dew ; the dust of the pathway was smoothed by it, and each one of their steps left its darker imprint upon the short close saturated grass. The air tasted like a thing freshly created, and for their pleasure. It acted upon Nevil's nerves like wine.

All day long he had attached himself more particularly to Clare's service. She climbed rather slowly but persistently ; he had expected she would have a cool head for

dangerous places, but the deftness with which she took advantage of every inch of foot-hold amused and surprised him. Presently he told her so.

“You would make an excellent mountaineer with a little more training. Would you like to sit down upon this heather for a little ? The view is very lovely here, and we have far distanced all the others. Yes, you would climb really well in time ; you have judgment, and you are not easily frightened.”

“Oh no, I am not frightened,” Clare said, letting herself fall upon the deep sun-warmed bed of heather.

They were seated on the very edge of a high plateau, only to be reached by a toilsome ascent over masses of rolling stones. The wood was at their back. From far far below them rose the sound of a glacier torrent ; and, at intervals, the tinkle of a cow-bell on some upland pasture. By this time it was nearly midday ; the pines had a strong resinous smell in the sun ; the

wind reached their heated faces in faint intermittent breaths.

Clare slowly took off her hat and gloves ; she panted a little ; her cheeks were flushed like the heart of a rose. The young man lay at her feet, in the heather, and watched her white hands pass and repass over her ruffled shining golden locks.

"How fond you are of flowers !" he said irrelevantly. And then, as she lifted her eyebrows interrogatively, a little surprised, "You see I am studying your tastes," he said, and laughed. "You—you are not a very easy person to understand, Miss Dillon."

"I ?"

"Ah, I have observed that it is very difficult to discover what really pleases you. And yet you know very well yourself ; you have very definite tastes."

"I know what pleases me, certainly," said Clare, dropping her eyelids. She sat quite still for several minutes ; at last she spoke, but without changing her attitude—

“Mr. Marlowe?”

“Well?”

“I should like to ask you: Why did you speak so roughly to that man, that guide, as we were coming up here? The man had done nothing to deserve it.”

“Well, you see, I thought he had. The man is a cheeky insolent sort of fellow; I thought it would do him good to be put back in his proper place. He was getting too familiar, by half.”

She looked at him gravely. “But if he did not know any better? The man did not mean to be impertinent. Why mortify him before his companions?” she said.

Nevil laughed. “Oh, that sort of people don’t mind a little strong language now and then. They are used to it. They like it. But I am sorry if it annoyed you; and he shall have something extra when we get home, to salve his wounded feelings.”

“I think—I think it would have been better to be just to him in the first

place," she persisted, hesitating a little and blushing.

"What an idea you have of justice."

"I think it is the first thing we owe to other people. I think—I know," she said slowly, and speaking with an effort, "it is not popular. People are always more prepared for what they don't deserve than for what is owed to them. I know it is much easier to be charming when you vary your grace with caprice and imperiousness than when it has no other alternative but silence, or the performance of obligations."

"Ah, you don't believe in taking life *en bon prince*."

"It is the pleasantest way—for the princes!"

"You are like Richard. You are a terrible Radical," said Marlowe, lazily, throwing back his head and half shutting his eyes, but continuing to watch her through the partly closed lids. Her manner of finding fault with him, first amused him; then gave

him a distinct sensation of pleasure. It was interesting to know how he looked in the calm serious eyes of this little girl. "What a good wife she will make for old Richard ! She will be my sister, my dear little sister," he thought, looking at her attentively ; and he smiled. Presently he said, in the same even absent tone of voice—

"By the way, Mr. Clayton has not favoured us with his company. I thought Mr. Clayton was coming with us, Miss Dillon."

"Did you ?" said Clare.

She leaned her head back also, lazily, against the moss-covered root of the pine. The sunlight filtering through the thick flat branches made little wandering lines of light upon her cheek and hair. She was as still as if she had been sleeping, but for the slow calm movement of her eyes—from the green canopy overhead, across the open valley, to the distant range of snow-peaks, of a greyish white against the pale dazzling blue of the sky. There was not the chattering of a

squirrel, not the call of a bird from the dark silent woods about them; the rush of the torrent was so continuous they had long ceased to listen to it; and when a bee passed buzzing sleepily in and out of the thyme and heather, the sound was distinctly audible for many minutes; she could trace its passage from one isolated purple tuft to the next.

“Mr. Marlowe?”

“I thought you were asleep. Well?”

“No, I am not asleep; but I was thinking. Do you know what this is like, being up here? Does it remind you of anything? No, it could not remind you; but I mean, does it suggest anything to you?”

“No. I don’t know,” said Marlowe, slowly. “The world seems infinitely large; as if it could very well do without us.”

“Yes,” Clare said quietly. And after a pause, she added, “I have a fancy that, at first, it is something like this after death—a sensation of light and of a great stillness,

as if time had stopped. As long as one lives one is never altogether one's self : there are so many claims, so many counter-currents. I always imagine that, afterwards, for a long time, one's greatest wish and delight will be the silence."

"One's delight."

"Why not? Surely you don't think death is like a disappointment?"

"I? No. But, but—death! it is so curious to hear you speak about it. What can you know of death?"

Clare stretched out her hand and plucked a bit of heather; she looked at it very closely, then brushed it against her lips. "My father died last year. He was very very old. And I have always lived with much older people——"

Marlowe nodded gravely. "I understand."

After that, they were both silent for several minutes. The bee came droning back through the sunny stillness; it nearly

flew into Nevil's upturned face, as he lay on his back, with one arm thrust behind him, and his hand clutching and ruffling his curly brown hair. Presently he said, in a very low voice—

“I have only known one person really pre-occupied with death—and *she* is afraid of it. It is the only thing she is afraid of, I think. It would be curious, now, to see you both together. I should like that. Yes ; I think I should like it.”

“But to see me with whom?”

“Did I speak? I must have been thinking aloud,” said Marlowe, promptly, looking at her and smiling. He sat up. “I was thinking of Gina San Donati, Gina Montenera, Richard's sister. She is a—a very old friend of mine.”

“Is she married?”

“Twice. The first time she married to please her grandfather. She was eighteen and her husband sixty. She was the Baroness Viani then.”

“ And now ? ”

“ Oh, now ! She has married to please— herself,” he said steadily, and still with that smile on his face.

He began talking to her about Richard ; about their boyhood together. Little by little he was drawn on to speak of his own interests ; of people he had known and things which had happened to him ; of books which he had read ; of his tastes, his preferences, himself.

She spoke very little ; indeed, at the best, she was never very talkative : but what a world of understanding there was in that silence ! what a treasure of prompt delicate sympathy under that reserve !

“ Yes ; she will make an adorable wife, a perfect wife, for Richard,” he said to himself again.

And she, on her side, she too, was conscious of this secret feeling of contentment and expansion. She looked up at Nevil at long intervals, but always with the same

expression of confidence and a quiet satisfaction in her glance. In all the months of her acquaintance with Herbert Clayton he had never succeeded in inspiring her once with this same sensation of absolute comprehension and repose. She felt, vaguely, like a traveller returning to his own country ; it was her own language that was being spoken to her ; and everything was closely familiar and yet new. A child in its mother's arms must know something of such security—a child understanding nothing, asking for nothing, but the protection of love.

They might have sat there talking quietly for some half-hour or more, Nevil leaning on one elbow and watching her, while she continued, automatically, to pluck up bits of grass by the root, each of which she examined carefully before she tossed it away : it was after some half-hour, then, of this desultory and confidential talk that Clare asked abruptly, " Mr. Marlowe, how old is

your old friend, the Signor San Donati's sister?"

"Gina? oh—the age of a Greek goddess," said Nevil, quickly; then he laughed.

"Ah!"

She turned her head a little aside, and looked attentively at the sprig of heather which she had stuck in the front of her dress. An intense, an unreasonable craving to have that flower for his own possessed him. He had watched her play with it: he mentally offered it to himself as a souvenir; a compensation. For what? He did not ask himself for what; but he wished for it. He felt that it was owed to him, and it would seem an act of pure injustice if she threw it away. Yet he could not ask for it——.

They sat so in silence for a minute or two; each wholly pre-occupied with the other. Nevil raised his head; he looked up as if about to speak,—and then the voices of the rest of the party became audible at some

little distance beneath them. It was easy to distinguish Miss Armitage's laugh.

"They, too, must have been resting," Clare said, listening. She rose slowly, and began brushing off the bits of moss and broken pine-needles which clung here and there to her cloth dress. While her head was turned away, "Is she so beautiful then?" she asked abruptly.

He took it for granted that she still meant Gina. "She is very beautiful. One of the beautiful women I have seen," he said.

"Ah. I ask because——. I have hardly heard her brother speak of her." She felt that this was not all her real motive for asking, and the colour deepened in her cheek. "And—and for other reasons also. I am curious about her," she added hastily, looking down.

"Richard does not speak very much of his family, I know. He is more like an Englishman in that respect than a foreigner.

He makes very little parade of his real feelings ;—don't you think so ? ”

“ You know him so much better than I do,” murmured Clare, turning away still more, and pulling at her glove. San Donati's face had risen before her at that moment : his face, not as she was accustomed to see it, but pale and imploring, with wild sad eyes which looked into hers as they had done last night. She stood perfectly still, gazing down at the broken and trampled heather where they had been sitting, with a half smile fixed upon her rigid lips. She was like a person too suddenly awakened from a dream.

“ They are taking the lower path ; evidently they have not seen us. Shall I go down and tell them ? ” Marlowe asked presently, wondering a little at her silence.

“ Why not ? ” said Clare, very gently.

He gave her one quick, puzzled, doubtful glance, and then walked rapidly away between the pine stems. She stood still,

without changing her attitude for a minute or two longer, and then she sighed half unconsciously, the colour slowly deepened in her face. She looked about her with a reflective astonished air ; it was positively like awakening from a dream.

CHAPTER V.

IN WHICH RICHARD RECEIVES AN ANSWER.

FOR the remainder of the day, and as if by a tacit consent, they rather avoided one another; Marlowe keeping almost continually by Miss Armitage's side, between whom and Lord Irwin there was a never-ceasing exchange of mocking speeches and quick laughter. Being both of them shrewd young people, they were not long in discovering the shadow of pre-occupation which underlaid all the gaiety of their new companion's manner, and presently Lord Irwin taxed him with it, soundly.

"It was the weather, the change in the weather," Marlowe affirmed gravely—"for

you have no idea, Miss Armitage, what an impressionable person I am. The merest shadow is enough to affect my estimate of the universe ! ”

“ What !—another sensitive plant ? It is a family trait, then. Now, this becomes interesting.”

“ Don’t you believe him, Miss Armitage. Nothing ever makes any real impression on Nevil. He is one of those fellows who are always thinking of something else. Now, I, on the contrary—— ”

“ Oh, you—— ! We decided that last night. You don’t think at all,” the girl interrupted, with her pretty impertinent laugh. “ But, Mr. Marlowe, is there a storm coming up, really ? ”

The young man glanced at the rapidly darkening sky. “ Well, it looks like it.”

“ Ah, a thunderstorm *à la Wagner* among these pines ! That is very nice of you ; it is even more than you promised me, Lord Irwin.”

"But, I say, Nevil——?"

"Well, of course the great thing would be to find some shelter. I suppose we can't really be so very far from the main road now? Look here, Irwin. Just call up that fool of a guide and ask him, will you? And I will go back and tell the others to be a little quick."

Clare was talking to a Miss Marston, a short compact active little Englishwoman of about five and forty, with bright eyes and smooth sandy hair and a very red face and throat, who, at Marlowe's request, had consented to chaperon their party. She had been a governess since the day she was eighteen, until, after more than five and twenty years of a dogged and detested servitude, an uncle, whom she had never seen, died intestate, leaving her a comfortable competence. With this she had come abroad, and, as she herself said, to digest her liberty. For more than a year her little persistent red face and determined figure

could have been met in every picture gallery, at the entrance of every sacristy, in Italy. She was always alone ; having, as she was quite ready to tell people, had enough in her time of enforced companionships. She was extremely communicative, but not from any particular softness or amiability of disposition ; her confidences had rather that sort of bald prosaic completeness which respects nothing and conceals nothing. It was the frankness of a character which has never trembled before the sacred mysterious joys and sorrows of a personal life. At this time she never opened a book, or, willingly, listened to a note of music ; and her chief enjoyment seemed to consist in a never-flagging physical activity. Nevil declared that she continually put him in mind of a small trotting mouse—but a mouse with a knowledge of traps and an experienced distrust of the smell of toasted cheese. She professed a great contempt for men in general, more especially for young

men. She considered them entirely unnecessary. Marlowe himself was very nearly the only exception she had ever been tempted to make to this rule ; the expression of her uncompromising battered-looking countenance was always modified by a smile at his approach.

"I am come to hurry you," he remarked now, on joining them. "Miss Armitage is anxious for a storm of heroic proportions. I confess I am less imaginative ; I only hope you will not get frightened, or too wet."

"Oh, as for me, I am a fast colour. I don't run in the washing," Miss Marston declared, with a jovial contented laugh. She usually spoke a little louder than was necessary ; at her last place one of her pupils had been deaf.

Clare held up her gloved hand, the first large drop of rain fell upon it with a splash. "I think I can promise you we won't be frightened," she said, smiling.

Even as she spoke the thunder was heard

approaching, rolling far off, sullenly, among the hills.

Nevil quickened his pace. "We are in for it now. I only hope you will not get too wet," he repeated rather impatiently.

The rain fell about them now in flickering silvery sheets of water; it trickled like a brook along the path that they were following.

"I shall run," Miss Marston declared suddenly. They could hear Irwin's voice shouting to them to "Come this way!" from a distance among the trees. "You may do as you like. *I shall run,*" she proclaimed vigorously, gathering up about her her short thick skirts. She disappeared at a solid steady trot, leaving behind her an impression of fluttering grey petticoats and sturdy serviceable ankles.

"Irwin must have found shelter. But you are getting terribly wet. I hope you won't catch cold?" Marlowe said solicitously, looking down with a very kind expression

at the little figure struggling against the wind by his side.

Clare shook her head. "Oh, no."

It was the second time the same question had been addressed to her within the last twenty-four hours. She remembered Clayton instantly, but everything which she remembered seemed to her vague, as if enveloped in a softening deadening mist. "And yet I must think of things. Time is passing. I must decide," she repeated to herself. But they were mere words, and led to nothing.

She was walking on very rapidly, with her head bent down, thinking something in this fashion, when she suddenly felt the weight of something heavy and thick laid across her shoulders, and was aware that Marlowe had taken off his rough coat and thrown it about her.

He only laughed at her when she protested. "Nonsense! As if I were not accustomed to an occasional shower! It's

rather refreshing, I assure you. Only, with all that to carry, you can hardly hope to emulate Miss Marston's Atalanta-like flight. I wonder, by the way, what has become of her. Hallo, there! I say, Irwin!"

"All right! Over here, to the left!"

They had come to a woodman's clearing, a small open space among the pines, crossed by a brook; and before them was the woodman's cottage, with Lord Irwin standing in the doorway and waving his hand. As they stepped out of the wood the sky to the east was all of a sudden lighted up with a blinching violet-coloured glare, which turned their faces to a livid sickly hue, and made the grass at their feet look like the arsenic-tinted turf in a pantomime. And then the thunder broke, peal after peal, rattling away among the hills, echoed and re-echoed from the heights, the sound seeming to pile itself up and increase like a tangible thing, as if some dormant natural force were awake, and presently to be apparent.

Lord Irwin ran out bareheaded into the rain, to give his hand to Miss Dillon across the unsteady plank which bridged the stream.

"Here you are at last. Miss Dillon, mind that board; you'll find it slippery. Go straight in, please. You will find Miss Armitage in there, superintending the fire. A little dampish, eh, Nevil?"

"Rather," said Marlowe, shaking his head and laughing. The rain was trickling down his neck, dripping from his curly hair. "Hallo! did you hear that?"

"Not being altogether deaf——. Had we not better go in there, and look a little after those young women? I say, Nevil, my boy, this is all very well, but have you reflected that it is going on for four o'clock, and that we are twelve or fourteen good miles from home, as it is?"

"The devil we are!"

"Exactly. And that's by the road. And we are still a good quarter of a mile from

that. And now, if you have done shaking yourself, come along and make yourself generally agreeable. The Lord be thanked," Irwin added piously, "the Lord be praised that at all events those young women are not of the variety of young women who scream."

Apparently they were not. A bright fire was blazing and crackling upon the stone floor, in the middle of the room, and under the blackened timbers of the chimney-piece, which descended, bell-shaped and smoky, from the raftered ceiling. The woodman's wife and the guide stood with their backs to the two young men, preparing something at a table. Miss Marston had established herself squarely in the warmest corner, and was methodically drying her muddy boots at the flame. Miss Armitage was sitting upon a low stool, watching the operation and laughing, her brilliant prettiness all aglow, rosy and radiant, like a rain-washed flower. Marlowe looked instinctively around for Clare.

She was kneeling before the bed of glowing coals, engaged in drying the sleeves of his pilot jacket. She got up from her knees quickly enough when she saw him, and advanced smiling, and holding up the heavy coat.

“ You were so very kind to take such care of me. Thanks to you, I am scarcely wet at all,” she said in her low soft voice. Her eyes were shining in the firelight. He let her stand there for an instant, looking down at her very kindly and approvingly, but making no movement to relieve her of the burden. The rain, dripping off the ribbon which bound her dark felt hat, had left a narrow line of blue across her temple. He observed even that discoloured streak, and even that pleased him. A sensation of serenity and well-being seemed to emanate from this young lady, and became, as it were, a part of the atmosphere which surrounded her. As she stood there before him in the firelight, there was something in the

simplicity and good-will of her action which touched the impressionable young man to a singular degree. It was well-nigh an impersonal sentiment, for she seemed to him at that moment chiefly to represent all the kindly securities of home life and gentle serviceable affection,—all those ties and satisfactions, in a word, without which his own daily existence was perforce conducted ; and without which, also, he had hitherto contrived to live with perfect enjoyment and content.

He took his coat from her then, with some phrase of thanks and acknowledgment, and went and joined the circle by the fire.

Miss Armitage and Lord Irwin had taken quarrelsome possession of an open saucepan between them ; they were entirely absorbed in endeavouring to concoct some coffee. It was like being in the schoolroom again, Marlowe said, laughing, after watching for a minute or two the struggles of these amateur cooks.

"It is all Lord Irwin's fault. He will keep watching the pot just as it is ready to boil," Miss Armitage declared, in an injured tone of voice, shielding her pretty face from the flame with both her white hands, on which the great rings sparkled bravely.

"Now, Nevil ! I leave it to you if I have once stopped looking at Miss Armitage—for orders."

"There never was a young man yet who could give his whole mind to anything seriously. They are a poor lot, always in a muddle, or else always in the way ; and always requiring to have the things they destroy mended for them. It would be a poor world indeed without the women," said Miss Marston, deliberately, changing the position of her feet upon the hot bricks ; "a poor world, with all its seams gaping—materially and morally too."

"Good Heavens, Miss Marston ! do you mean that getting in the way is our only occupation ?"

“Well, after a storm like this, I dare say you might find other openings for your talents. Some of you might look out for a vacancy among the weather-cocks—unless, perhaps, you found the work too steady?”

“Oh, but unfortunately that is the only thing in the world I am particular about. I always pick out my own wind to sail by,” cried out Lord Irwin, with a great good-natured laugh. This caustic red-faced little woman was a constant source of amusement to him. “She makes me feel myself in the nursery again, in a frilled collar, don’t you know?” he confided to Miss Armitage, *sotto voce*. “But, by Jove! women who are so fond of defending their sex in the mass are precious apt to scratch each other in private. They must get the balance right somehow; and their idea of union is never to give an individual a chance—at least, not an individual who disagrees with them. Don’t you think so?”

“I don’t know,” said Miss Armitage,

softly. "I only know I shouldn't care to come under that dear old lady's tender mercies if I had been—if I had just—well, if I had just disposed of some man."

"Miss Armitage, I never was so frightened in my life. This revelation is almost too horrible to be credible. And *how* do you dispose of them, may I ask?"

The girl broke into one of her little rapturous laughs. "I devour them," she declared solemnly, and looking at him with her great lustrous eyes. "I decoy them into a cavern and devour them. Lord Irwin, the water is boiling over. And—oh, how I wish I had known you when you wore a white collar with frills!"

Meantime, Nevil and Clare were seated together, and talking quietly. He said, "You are sure this storm does not frighten you? Hark! those thunderclaps really are a little like Wagner."

"The Marchese said, the other day, that the wind at a distance in the pine-tops was

like Beethoven. You are determined to be musical in your comparisons at any cost," said Clare, looking at the fire and smiling.

"Well, it is one of Richard's fancies that in Beethoven, as in Wagner, he finds one and the same quality. Both have something of the infinite of the ocean in them: but in one it is the solemn irresistible weight of waters far from land; in the other the fretted wave dashing against the shore. Yet both are of the same sea." He sat for a moment silent, gazing fixedly and abstractedly at the leaping and wavering fire. "Yes, both of the same sea," he added after a pause; "they move in answer to the same compelling tide."

Clare glanced at him quickly, then looked away.

"Is that what you think?" she asked softly.

"I? Lord bless you, I know nothing about music. It is Richard's fancy and—and I really believe I was applying it to

something quite different, do you know?" Marlowe said, in an altered sort of voice, sitting up briskly and rubbing one hand over his hair. "That fire makes one—talk nonsense," he added presently. "Come and have a look at the weather."

The storm was abating, but it was still raining; the pines bent their dark tops and swayed, as it were, reluctantly under the heavy threatening sky.

As they stood together looking out of the window, "I want you to tell me something," Marlowe said, in a low voice. "Will it make any difference to you—I mean, have you any particular wish or fancy about getting back to the inn to-night? I must tell you that the guide proposes that you ladies should remain here until to-morrow morning. He would stay with you, and Irwin and I will go home and let them know you are in safety. But would you like that? It is for you to decide."

She was silent for a moment.

“Could not the others stay, if they prefer it, and I go back with you—with you and Lord Irwin? I am not afraid of the rain—you know I am not. And I—I particularly wish to go back to-night.”

“You are sure you wish it?” he asked slowly, and not looking at her.

“Oh yes, I wish it,” said Clare.

“Very well.”

He glanced at his watch, and then picked up his hat, making a movement towards the door.

“But you are not going out now—not before the rain stops?” she said hastily, taking a step towards him, and half putting out her hand.

Marlowe laughed, but he looked at her very kindly. “Indeed, I am only going to carry out your wishes. I have a fancy that you ought always to do what you please; for—do you mind my saying it?—your pleasure seems to be chiefly the giving of happiness to others.” And with that, and

with another quick glance, first at her, and then all about the low brown firelit room, the young man went out cheerfully, to find his way as best he might through the storm.

It was something more than an hour before he returned to announce that a rough but practicable cart-track went over the pass within ten minutes' scramble from the woodman's hut, where they had found refuge, and that he had succeeded in engaging the services of a driver with a small country trap—"a trap that will only hold two persons," as he explained to Miss Marston. "I'm very sorry, but it was the best I could do. Fortunately, you ladies prefer remaining here. Irwin, you will drive back with Miss Dillon, and try and see that she is moderately comfortable? I fear it will be but very moderate at the best."

"All right; I shall be very happy. But—I say—Nevil——?"

"Oh, I'm all right. I shall walk. I like

it, and it will warm me," Marlowe added hastily.

He went with them as far as the carriage. It was very dark under the dripping pines, and once or twice Clare stumbled. The second time he took her hand, and held it in his strong careful grasp, but neither of them spoke. Irwin was walking on a few paces in front. They did not exchange a word until he had placed her in the carriage and carefully buttoned up the apron. There was a bunch of wet mountain flowers lying on the seat beside her—stiff sprays of rhododendron, and a loose handful of aromatic thyme. He picked it up and laid it in her lap.

"I got them for you while the trap was getting ready. Well, good night, and *bon voyage*. Take good care of Miss Dillon, Irwin. I hope you will not be very uncomfortable, Miss Dillon. At any rate, it is a lucky thing the rain has stopped."

She held out her hand. "Thank you; and good night, Mr. Marlowe."

“Good night.” He took off his hat, and looked at her, and hesitated.

Irwin and the driver were busy over one of the carriage-lamps, which would not stay lighted. “Confound the thing, it does not seem to have any wick! What do they call a wick in German, Nevil?” my lord called out impatiently.

Marlowe took a single step nearer, “*Bon voyage* and—and *bonne chance!*” he said abruptly. “Miss Dillon, will you take a message to Richard for me?”

“Surely.”

“Tell him I sent him word not to forget our conversation of yesterday afternoon before Irwin came in. Tell him I sent him word. Do you think you can remember it?”

“He is not to forget what you spoke of before Lord Irwin returned. Is that it? Very well; I will tell him. Good night again.”

“Good night. Good night, Irwin.”

“Well, good night, old boy. See you later.”

The trap drove off with much creaking and rattling of the harness, leaving him standing in the middle of the road. He stood still there for several minutes, then he turned and looked after them, or rather in the direction they had gone. It was too dark by this time to distinguish anything. The rain, as he said, had stopped; the clouds were already parting overhead. He stood in the middle of the muddy road, and asked himself, “Now, what the devil did I do *that* for?” He did not particularize what it was which puzzled him; there seemed to be a general sense of blankness in most things.

Presently a curious sensation, as of being watched from behind, made him lift his eyes hastily and look about him. Just overhead a pallid watery moon was disappearing furtively behind the storm-rack, seeming in the general movement of the breaking

sky to undulate away like a thing surprised. Nevil looked up at this unquiet moon, with an odd feeling of having been entrapped into taking it into his confidence. "Well," he said out loud, "and what do *you* know about it, eh?" The clouds closed again, and he laughed, and went whistling down the hill.

As for Clare and her companion, they had hardly exchanged a dozen sentences all the way home. "I am tired, Lord Irwin. Please forgive me if I am very dull; but I am so tired," the girl had answered to his first good-natured attempt to draw her into conversation; and doubtless the excuse was true enough in its way. For of all that long drive homeward Clare had afterwards no very definite memory. "It is not at the time of a crisis that one decides anything. The decisions lie *perdu* in the character; and what one does at the critical moment is but a logical sequence of what has gone before, and needs no especial pre-

paration or energy. That is why vital actions are wont to appear so natural and simple; and in life we reserve our widest-eyed wonder for what is of passing concern," she remarked, in her quiet way, long after, to a friend. And no doubt she spoke from experience—and had paid for the gaining of it, too—and with the customary disproportion of pain.

They drove through the wet wood, then, in silence. From time to time the driver, a stolid peasant lad, chirruped to his horse. The moon stole in and out, looking down at them curiously. At length a bridge was passed—the very bridge on which she had stood the night before with Clayton. They had struck into the highroad, and there, already before them, were the village lights shining through the dark.

Her sister met her by the entrance; but, after a few words of anxious and tender welcome, Clare left her on some pretext, and went up by herself to the empty dining-hall.

Richard was waiting for her there, and alone, as she had expected. He was sitting by the table, in the light of the lamp. A book lay open before him. It was an odd volume of *La Casa*; he remembered it long afterwards, and had always a fondness for the book. But he was not reading. The light was shining upon him in such a way that his pale eager face, all alive with suspense and longing, relieved sharply against the shadow cast by his person upon the whitewashed wall. His eyes were fixed upon the open window. People were speaking in a confused murmur of voices outside, loudly congratulatory over the safe return. It was evident that he was not expecting her yet. He had not heard her light footfall upon the stair.

She stood in the doorway, looking at him, at the wild expectation of his glance and the pitiful grotesqueness, the exaggerated mockery of the shadow behind. He half turned his head with an impatient sigh. It

moved as he moved—the visible ironical negation of his life.

This repetition of what had distressed her the night before, now struck Clare's heart with a sudden generous passion of pity, as she realized that thus it had always been with him and must be to the end. The lonely figure looked all the more isolated for the presence of this grim companion. She took a hasty step or two forward, and then paused, half-way across the room, hesitating. In her hand she still held the bunch of flowers which Marlowe had given her, and it was the searching perfume of the thyme which first attracted Richard's attention and made him look up. He never forgot it. As long as he lives he will never forget her as she stood there, gazing at him; her eyes fixed; her golden hair shining in the lamp-light; and about all her person a breath of the fresh mountain air, an odour of the pine woods and of aromatic flowers and herbs.

He rose to his feet with some passionate,

inarticulate exclamation. She held out both her little hands.

“I am come——” Her eyes filled suddenly, and to her own surprise, with tears. She shook her head, smiling. “I come to tell you that—if it will make you happy—I am ready to marry you, Richard,” she said.

CHAPTER VI.

FAMILY AFFAIRS.

RICCARDO, Marchese di San Donati, was the heir, and last male representative in the direct line, of a very ancient and noble family. It is said that the first of the name, a certain Raoul or Renato, abandoned his possessions in Normandy, whatever these may have been, to follow the fortunes of Charles of Anjou in his invasion of Italy, and was there rewarded for some unknown service by the gift of a confiscated fief; to which, in due course of time, and Raoul having in the meanwhile taken unto himself an Italian wife, was added the title of Baron. But Monsignor Agostino della Chiesa, in his

manuscript history of Piedmont, inclines rather to another version of the San Donati legend, according to which that illustrious race would owe much of its past prosperity to the prowess of one Giacomo, a soldier of fortune, also out of France (for in both versions the Normandy origin holds good); to whom, circa 1340, the Queen Joanna was graciously pleased to grant sundry lands in Piedmont, with the privilege of building thereon a castle, to be held to the greater glory of God and the discomfiture of all enemies and traitors to the noble house of Anjou.

Whichever account is adopted as the more probable—and Richard himself used to laugh in his wild way at both of them, and even, as a boy, incurred his terrible grandfather's gravest displeasure by the perpetration of an ironical sketch of the Origins of the House, in which drawing the family tree was depicted something after the fashion of a banyan tree, with roots which derived

their august existence from fantastically opposing sources,—whichever account may appear credible, there could be no question of the great antiquity of the name, which, as Richard again declared, had for five centuries been only distinguished for its mediocrity. Certainly in all that time no San Donati had ever lifted his head so high above his fellows as to bring down upon it the powerful and obliterating hand of his richer neighbours. They had managed in some fashion from the first to gratify the family capacity or the family vengeance in such a manner as to awake no particular attention; and in this mingled prudence and obstinacy he pretended to recognize positive proof of his traditional origin: from no other race, outside of Normandy, he was pleased to declare, could so much tenacity and vitality have been derived linked to such narrow fortunes.

Of this hereditary obstinacy, or tenacity,—not to call so ancient and well-descended

a quality by too hard a name,—there had been in the length and breadth of the San Donati annals no better example than that afforded by the old Marchese Andrea, Richard's grandfather, and one of the principal personages of his youth.

This Andrea was first Marquis of the name, having received his title from King Carlo Alberto, and in a manner which shall be described hereafter ; and it is probable that he, at least, saw little to laugh at in the irreverent jokes of his grandson, being, indeed, rather more inclined to regard them as somewhat exaggerated statements of fact. For what love, or religion, or ambition, have been to other men, the reverence of his family was to the old Marchese. To be a representative San Donati was at once his object in life and his creed. He made of it his religion ; and he, who believed in nothing, continued to the end of his life to believe himself a being set apart. He was naïvely conscious of his

own superiority to the rest of humanity, but it seemed to him quite simple, and not to be wondered at.

As Richard first remembered him, he was an old man already, with a pale face, high features of a classic regularity of outline, and extraordinarily straight black brows. He was tall, and of a very noble and commanding presence, retaining to the last traces of that great personal beauty which had distinguished him in his youth. After he left the Court he never again modified the style of his clothes, nor the fashion of dressing his hair, which was extremely black and abundant, and which he always continued to wear in a peruke. For the last years of his life he always walked about the house with a gold-headed cane, followed by two blue-grey Danish dogs, of the royal breed, and a present to him from the royal kennel. The merest intimation of his coming, the sound of his stick on the stairs, the first sound of his high, deliberate,

unmodulated voice, cast a sort of terror over the whole establishment, and priests, children, and servants, they were all equally conscious of shrinking away, or cringing at his approach.

A great portion of the day he spent in his own apartments. When he was not busy with the exigencies of an elaborate toilet, he was accustomed to be read to for hours, in English, or in French, as the case might be. He was an omnivorous devourer of books, chiefly of a philosophical and historical order, although he never opened a volume himself, preferring to have all that sort of labour done for him by some inferior person.

As may easily be imagined, this position of reader in ordinary to M. le Marquis was a post of more honour than security ; it fell, for the most part, and for many years, to the family chaplain, one Father Faber, an Irish priest, educated in Paris ; a good and inoffensive old man, with large timid brown

eyes, which he was continually wiping with a silk pocket handkerchief; and from whom Richard remembers to have received nothing but marks of good-will and kindness. This was not the only priest established in the house, for beside the lad's own tutor—a Jesuit, named Grossi, who did not stay with him for long—there was also the Abbé de Chateauneuf, his mother's director; a young man of good birth and coldly repressive manners, with whom not even the redoubtable Marchese had ever been known to take a liberty, and altogether a different sort of personage from the good-natured Irishman.

At long intervals, Richard remembers having seen his own mother assume, for a day, this doubtful privilege of reading to the old Marchese. On such occasions, the little lad was wont to retire, with good Father Faber, to the priests' quarter of the old palazzo, and there spend the afternoon in a sort of religious game or pastime, which included the lighting of many candles, and the re-

petition of a long versified Latin litany, or hymn, to the Virgin, composed in honour of Our Lady, by the good Father, and devoutly chanted on his knees by his little acolyte and pupil. How much he understood of these practices, or was impressed by them, he hardly knew himself. But the child's heart was full to overflowing with an ardour of love, which, in this stern old house, it seemed that nobody asked for and nobody wanted. Indeed, good Father Faber, and old Monica, the boy's foster-mother, were the only two members of the household who did not appear too pre-occupied or too disdainful to care for his childish caresses. But old Monica was away in the country, at San Donato; and here, in Turin, Richard was only too glad to be allowed to wait upon the good-natured priest, and ran his errands for him, or served his mass, with a passion of gratitude for the careless kindness shown him, which made a difference in all his child-

hood. And, indeed, this passion of love which he poured out so lavishly may have been, for aught I know, the only thing which saved him from that creeping paralysis of self-absorption which possessed the rest of the household,—and so, and in the manner of most love, have been its own greatest reward.

At the conclusion of these pious exercises, Richard was accustomed to be invited to share in the old man's afternoon cup of coffee. There were always certain delicious cakes and other sweets as well, curious conventual dainties, of which master and pupil partook with an equal and sympathetic appetite. If, by any evil chance, M. le Directeur came near them at that moment, the sight of his rigid scornful young face brought much confusion upon these innocent saturnalian, but for the most part they were undisturbed.

If all went well, when the coffee and sweetmeats were finished, little Richard

would climb upon a chair, to reach down the violin from its place of honour above the great carved chimney-piece. And then for the sensitive poetical child would follow an hour of purest, noblest enjoyment—an hour in which heaven opened and the angels sang. The good Father's room had a window which looked out upon the palace gardens. In the afternoon the spreading branches of the great chestnut trees filled the quiet room with a dim flickering green shade. To little Richard's fancy it seemed as if the trees were listening as well—reaching up with all their myriads of light leaves, rustling and whispering together outside of the casement because of the delicious music within. Only the row of cypresses down by the old fountain were dark and still as ever, holding no sympathy in common with what was making his own child's heart beat faster with awe and delight. Indeed, that flagged walk by the fountain was the path in which the old Marchese was fondest of walking,

and for that and for other reasons the boy went there very seldom, choosing to pretend to himself that this especial corner was haunted by sundry evil spirits, and therefore to be avoided except in the broadest light of day.

On one occasion he confided some such idea to the good-natured Father, crying out in his wild way that the cypresses were no better than wicked enchanters, who understood things, and knew there was no one here in the house who wanted him.

“Enchanters! evil spirits! Nay, Richard, my son, I fear that the only spirit to be rebuked here is your own evil spirit of rebellion against authority. Enchanters, say you? Faith, how were you to know aught of enchanters—the saints forgive you!—if you had not been at your old tricks again, ferreting about, and reading all manner of heathen books? Now, answer me that, you young sinner, you!” the good-natured priest retorted, putting down his violin and

eyeing the little convicted criminal very humorously.

Indeed, the child had been at his beloved Ariosto again, and in the morning, too, and when he should have been busiest with his Latin. He confessed as much presently, hanging his head and with crimsoning cheeks, but adding—since he had inherited in his little person no small share of the family audacity—that, as he grew older, he proposed to devote still more of his time to his favourite class of studies; “for you know, Father Faber, that I cannot be a soldier, and so nobody cares what I do or what becomes of me. I can do as I please; and I shall be a poet when I am a man.”

“A poet, will you? Then I’m thinking ’twill be the first specimen of the kind in your family,” the priest observed, very good-humouredly. “As for your not being a soldier, that’s perhaps not so altogether to be regretted, seeing that there’s never been a San Donati yet died quietly in his bed

without having to confess of the souls he'd sent before him on the road to glory. It's been a fine murdering rioting family this, the saints preserve them ! But they died like Christians, every man o' them, mark that. You be ready to do as much when your own turn comes, and it won't make so much difference how you call yourself. A poet ? Well, well. Nay, I'm not saying you're not right to turn your attention to that sort of thing, my boy," he said, looking at the little lad very kindly. "Older men than you have amused themselves in that way. Ay, and well-built men likewise," he added, with a complacent glance at his own straight plump leg and neat black stocking ; "and, more by token, there's that identical trifle of my own composing, the elegant hymn to Our Lady you have been singing this blessed day."

"I don't mean to write hymns," Richard answered shortly ; and then, turning very red, "I—I suppose I never *can* be a soldier

like the others, Father Faber?" he said, rather wistfully.

"Nay, my son, nay. 'Tis a pity," said Father Faber, taking snuff—" 'tis a great pity that, since there had to be this affliction laid upon one of you, it could not have fallen to the lot of your sister Gina. For women, Richard, my son, are better fitted to endure burdens than men, being, indeed, most admirably adapted by a merciful Providence to the enduring of much disappointment and sorrow."

"Oh, but Gina! Gina is beautiful. Gina is like an Amazon princess. She is like Clorinda in the poem, Father, don't you know? only Gina would have killed Tancred herself, or wounded him. Perhaps she would only have wounded him," cried little Richard eagerly. "She might have wounded him, but nothing could hurt Gina!"

He might have been eight or nine years old at the time, and his curly brown head was already fuller than it could hold of

confused visions of gallant white-plumed knights riding through green enchanted forest aisles; of fair ladies, and fairer sorceresses with more enticing eyes. All the glimmering faëry world of old Italian verse was as a real place to the lonely child. Its inhabitants were his familiars. He lived apart—in a dream, where nothing seemed to reach him but the call of that beloved music; from which nothing could altogether awake him but the rare sound of some kindly spoken word. For the rest, he was as one enwrapped in visions. If any one spoke harshly to him, he but shrank farther into himself, flying for refuge to his beloved books, as one of Tasso's nymphs might have flown for protection to some well-tested haunt, deep in the dewy woods.

After some such conversation as this, and leaving the good Father peacefully dozing in his arm-chair by the open window, while the sun sank lower behind the tree-tops and the shining air was stirred by a delicious

confusion of countless warblings and the fluttering of circling wings,—after a talk of this kind, the little lad would creep noiselessly down the stairs, and through many lofty empty passages, until he reached the fatal door leading to his grandfather's apartment. On how many afternoons has not that quaint little figure waited there, with beating heart, among the gathering shadows, until a pause in the continued murmur of voices, the rustle of a dress, perhaps the quick bark of a dog awakened from its sleep, showed him that the dreaded audience had again been brought to a peaceful end. The child never waited to see his mother appear, but would flit away, satisfied, and as noiselessly as he had come, to his own corner in the unused library.

As a matter of fact his fears were of a very childish order; for, indeed, his pale young widowed daughter-in-law was well-nigh the only person in the house to whom the old Marquis was habitually and uniformly

indulgent. It was impossible to aver of him that he felt a personal affection for any one; but, such as it was, she had the privilege of pleasing him. He very seldom spoke to her, and never by any chance consulted her about the children: but that, with him, was mere habit; it had ever been a part of his creed that one did not speak of serious things to women.

After she had left him, he would sit for hours, motionless, in his great gilded arm-chair, his dogs at his feet, his cold piercing eyes half veiled by the drooping lids, slowly tapping his snuff-box with the fingers of one hand—those great white hands of which he was inordinately vain, and which, indeed, seemed only fit for handling a sword, or a horse, or offering some disdainful caress to a woman.

Contempt, a secret, intimate, unalterable contempt of the lives about him, that was what his face perpetually expressed. A sterile disdain of others, an unquestionable

courage, a pride which could be moved almost to tears by the careless favour of a prince, a cold persistent obstinacy, and selfishness—above all things, selfishness, immutable, implacable, eternal,—these were the instincts which he brought into the world with him, and it was with these qualities that he went to his grave. It was contempt which made him silent in the presence of others. In the long afternoons, alone, with his dogs sleeping at his feet, he would spend hours going over to himself, detail by detail, the history of his past life—of that brilliant court life which he never mentioned, and which had branded his soul for ever with the mark of a sterile and bitter regret.

CHAPTER VII.

IN WHICH RICHARD HEARS OF A
MISFORTUNE.

ANDREA SAN DONATI was born in Turin in 1796. His father, the Count Robert, was for many years aide-de-camp, personal friend, and confidential adviser to the gallant and unfortunate Vittorio Amedeo II.—a king without a court or a kingdom, without money or troops. The royal sword, and the service of the handful of devoted gentlemen who still worshipped the paling star of the royal fortunes, that was all this outlawed prince could call his own ; and he scoured his hereditary land of Piedmont on horseback, armed to the teeth, and a fugitive ; never

knowing, as the morning broke, where next he should find shelter and a bed, and yet retaining through it all a gay and unalterable good-humour, and a courage which only rose the higher after every check.

One of the old Marchese Andrea's earliest recollections was the being taken by his father to the then head-quarters of the royal fugitive, and instructed to kneel when he was given the gracious royal hand to kiss. Doubtless the good-natured prince would fain have offered some more substantial token of his favour to the son of his most faithful follower; but if the royal intentions were generous, the royal finances were low. It was the aide-de-camp and treasurer who gravely pointed out to him this difficulty. But the King only swore a good round oath, pushing his treasurer aside, and laughing consumedly.

"Now, by our faith, as a gentleman," he declared, "it shall never be said that Victor Amedeo had not the wherewithal to reward

a friend !” And there and then, while his little troop of followers crowded about him, he twisted off a great shining link from the Grand Collar of his Order, which he wore about his neck, and bestowed it upon the kneeling boy.

Young Andrea never forgot that scene. It seemed, indeed, as if the glitter of the royal gold had dazzled him for life. From that moment, body and soul, he belonged to whatever the King's cause might be ; and his father, the Count Robert, dying within a year or so of that time, the lad would have asked no better, child'as he was, than to attach himself to the service of the same master. But it was not to be supposed that the son and heir of so notorious and justly suspected a rebel should at that period of the Napoleonic reign, be allowed to have much to do with the carrying out of his own destiny. The fatal hand which had caught all Europe by the throat was never too busy to interfere in any private history,

and, in 1810, by order of his Majesty Napoleon I., Andrea San Donati received an appointment to the military academy of St. Cyr. It was called an appointment, but the nomination came through the hands of the then Prefect of Turin, and was altogether not an honour which was open to much discussion.

Until 1815, then, the boy continued to reside in France, his inheritance being looked after, the while, by a sort of family council. He had no very near relatives, his mother, also, having died soon after his birth. He belonged to a generation of whom it has been said that, "*Napoléon leur avait fouetté le sang ;*" and indeed it seems as if life did move more freely about them, and these boys of fifteen, growing up in face of illimitable horizons, blinded by the light of incalculable glory, accustomed to look on while the world was being shared, their young imaginations fired and seared by the spectacle of countless and uncounted

human sacrifices, of all that was great and unjust and splendidly victorious,—these children, then, I say, had no childhood, but, at their very first steps out into that maddened and intoxicating world, could be trusted to take their own places and hold them.

It was not until after Waterloo, where he acquitted himself with considerable distinction, that the young Count found himself free to return to his own country; where, presently, he took service again, under the new King. It is impossible to describe with what feelings he returned to Italy. To the end of his life he remembered the mingled rush of pride and curiosity and antipathy with which he took possession of his ancestral home. He had left la belle France definitely behind him—Paris, glittering and resonant with the splendour of a hundred victories,—to find himself an exile, and yet a familiar, in a provincial Italian town. Boy as he was, he was yet

looked upon with suspicion by those whose names would have seemed a warrant of welcome and good fellowship to the representative of the San Donati house. It seemed as if, in his great fall, the Emperor had shaken the foundations of every fortune among his followers; and *pour comble de malheur*, and like all other Napoleonists, the young St. Cyrien was compelled to forfeit a grade on entering the Piedmontese army, and see his shoulder shorn of one of his beloved epaulets.

Until 1821, the life he led was not materially different from that of any other rich and idle young officer of his time. He was neither better nor worse than his fellows, and only distinguished himself among them by more reckless dissoluteness, a greater force of vitality, and a more unscrupulous will. But in that same spring of 1821, the revolutionary spirit, which had long been fermenting among the disaffected troops, coming to a head, rebellion broke

out, and on the morning of the 10th of March the good people of Turin were awakened to the sound of drums beating and soldiers marching. In the teeth of the Holy Alliance, the constitution of Spain was advocated, and the subjects of Piedmont declared free.

As may be imagined, Lieutenant San Donati lost no time in throwing on his uniform, and galloping to the palace. Early as he was, others had arrived before him ; the courtyard was alive with the murmur of men's voices, and the trampling of horses being led up and down. One of his own men, an old soldier of Napoleon's, and now in the Piemonte Reale regiment, came running up to take the officer's horse, and San Donati, recognizing his face, began to question him,—bidding him, with an oath, to say how soon, and where, his Majesty proposed to settle with these rebels.

The old soldier hung his head. “ Mais, mon officier, we have had no orders—yet,” he muttered sorrowfully.

At every instant fresh horses were arriving, led by grooms in livery. Their masters were upstairs, at the King's Council; and there, indeed, Andrea found them presently—a devoted group of old white-haired men, surrounding their royal master. As the young Count entered—the servants having, for the most part, deserted their posts, and there being scarce any difficulty in reaching the royal presence,—the noble old General di Rodi was speaking.

“We are here at your Majesty's service,” the good old man was saying, in a voice which trembled more from emotion than from all the weight of his seventy odd years. “We belong heart and soul to your Majesty. We humbly implore your Most Gracious Majesty to make use of us on this occasion; to authorize us to act; to take some decision——”

His Gracious Majesty had risen, and was leaning with both hands' upon the back of a damasked chair, marked with the royal arms.

In the silence which followed, the cracking of the frail gilded wood was distinctly audible. The weak, honest, well-intentioned prince was torn by a thousand conflicting doubts and fears. He was incapable of any resolution ; and, in the meantime,—misled, possibly, by the length of a hesitation which, to their simple and limited understandings, could only end in one result,—a few of the oldest among these faithful servitors had already left the Council chamber, and were even then in the courtyard, being helped into their saddles by the astonished grooms, in order that no difficulty of aged movement or stiffened muscle might cause one instant of delay in the execution of the King's orders.

As Andrea di San Donati advanced up the long tapestried hall, his sword clanking by his side, in all his fresh bravery of crimson and gold, and with that air of brilliant expectation and excitement upon his extraordinarily handsome face, every man

present stopped involuntarily in his talk to gaze at him. He looked, indeed, like the inspired precursor of triumphant tidings, and even the harassed King seemed to feel a sudden contagion of new hope and spirit. "Who is it? Who comes here?" he asks, his dim face lighting up.

Some gentleman-in-waiting named him.

"My family, my father, were ever servants of your Majesty's house," the young man added simply, but with a very grand air.

Pressed to add his own opinion to that of others so superior to him both in rank and age, the young officer never hesitated; he was all for instant action. "Let your Majesty but place himself at the head of the handful of troops that are still faithful, and before the day is over we shall have all the army, all Turin, all Piedmont at our backs." And then, as the royal listener only shook his head with a melancholy gesture of dissent, "Let the King but give one of us the

commission," the young man urged, with beating heart, and falling on his knee. "Let me go ! Let me take what is left of my regiment, and go—alone ! An hour—a single charge of gentlemen would clear those *manants*——"

"Now Our Lady of Mercy and the Blessed Saint Mary Magdalene forbid that I should have one drop of this blood upon my soul !" the King answered at last, crossing himself devoutly, and with a very heavy sigh. The others had fallen back a step, and these two were alone in the embrasure of a quiet window. "You speak of a charge of the gentlemen of my household:—look !" his Majesty added suddenly, and pointed to the window with his great white hand. A few flakes of snow were drifting slowly from the leaden sky upon a little group of figures in the vast empty courtyard, where a very old man in general's uniform was being painfully assisted to mount his fretting horse. "Look !" the king repeated.

The young man's eyes followed the direction of the pointing finger. He saw the royal hand tremble as it pointed.

"It is over. All is over," said Victor Emmanuel, advancing into the middle of the room.

There would be, the King said presently, there might be to others the alternative of yielding to the demands of the insurgents, or even of treating with them. But such had never been the custom of the House of Savoy. As for him he was decided to abdicate, and here would thank his faithful servants, and so bid them farewell.

The greater part of these old soldiers, of seventy and eighty years of age, had spent the last three days of agony in the ante-chamber of the palace, and awaiting the orders of the King ; and now, as each white head bowed low over the extended hand of majesty, they seemed more like a procession of ghosts than of living men bidding farewell to what glorious traditions and

witnessing the death of what seemingly immortal hopes ! And presently, a servant having been sent down the stair to summon them, Andrea, still staring blankly out of window, saw the men in the snowy courtyard dismount, and the horses led slowly away.

With the abdication of the King came untimely end to all the young officer's ambitious dreams of glory and swift advancement ; and, presently, the necessity of finding another place of residence. For with the new Government came new men and new interests ; Andrea San Donati was not left long in ignorance of the fact that his name also figured in the list of the late King's favourites, to whom nothing would be officially refused, but to whom all hopes of promotion were forbidden. So that before long (it was, indeed, just after the execution of the unfortunate Captain Garelli, and while Collegno, La Cisterna, and how many others, could still be seen at Turin, hanging

in effigy), the young Count, abandoning court and army, retired to his country seat of San Donato, on the south coast. And there, within the year, he married.

His wife was a certain Contessina Cristina Correr, who survived her marriage only a few years. She seems to have been a foolish, pretty, amiable young woman, as seen in the picture of her now in the portrait gallery of the Palazzo San Donati at Turin, where she is depicted in pastel, in a rose-coloured robe, with her hair dressed *à la Chinoise*, smiling agreeably and looking at a crystal ball. This rather vague indication of character seems to be all that is left of her personality. She passed through life lightly, without difficulty, and leaving no more impression behind her than the passing of a summer cloud. Her only child, Enrico Riccardo, was brought up in the country, entirely by his father, whom he in no way resembled. He belonged, by his nature to the class of mankind whom all manner of

violence revolted. With his mother's frailty of nature, he inherited a considerable dose of poetic sensibility and weakness. He painted a little ; he played on the violin ; he wrote verses. When he followed his father to Turin it was always under protest. Life about the Court, made up as it was of bitter rivalries and a constant war of intrigue, was a prolonged misery to him ; but apparently he never even contemplated the possibility of defying the paternal will.

He, too, married very young—a wife selected for him by the old Marchese,—a beautiful young girl, just out of a convent, with whom her husband fell instantly and deeply in love, in his passionate weak way. Of her, also, there exists a portrait in the long, tapestried hall : the picture of a very young woman clad *en chasseresse*, with her bow slung across her white shoulder, and her white hand resting on the head of a large dog. She stands in the midst of a very mythological landscape, wherein even the

forms of the trees seem to smack of fable, smiling out of the frame with a singular expression of joyous and caressing trust. She seems for ever on the point of making some charming confidence to the spectator concerning the cause of her irrepressible youthful delight. When Richard was still a little boy, this picture seemed to him much more to represent his real mother than the pale dark-eyed woman, in black robes, whom he passed occasionally in the long corridors of the quiet old house, and whose hand he was wont dutifully to kiss at night. A secret feeling of comradeship existed between the lonely little child and this smiling portrait, in which, as he grew older, nothing ever seemed to him more wonderful than that smile.

Indeed, it was small wonder that he never remembered having seen it, or anything like it, upon his mother's altered countenance. Before the third year of their marriage was well over, it was only

the dread of his father's anger which sufficed to keep the young Viscount Enrico in even moderate submission at Turin. To the young man, brought up in the easy self-indulgence of life in a little country village, there was something well-nigh unendurable in the restrictions and strenuous unremitting effort of an existence at court. And as for his beautiful wife, his Diana, as he had been wont fondly to call her, her wishes and expectations had begun to seem too persistent, too continuous, for comfort. In plain words, her husband had grown tired of her—tired of the life he was expected to lead with her. He said little or nothing about his feelings, but an air of sombre discontent was seldom long away from his countenance; his whole being was possessed with a restless activity of ennui; Diana's worshipper had begun to yawn in her face.

It is impossible to say what line of conduct the old Marchese would have taken in this matter, or on whom the formidable

weight of his displeasure was likely to fall ; for, just at this juncture, while his father was intriguing more actively than ever to re-establish his forfeited position at court, and when the chains of his servitude were beginning to make themselves still more heavily felt, an accident occurred which modified the course of all their destinies : the young Viscount was thrown from his horse while in attendance on the King ; he was picked up by his own father, insensible ; and within twenty-four hours he was dead.

This event took place only three or four months before the birth of little Richard. As soon as she was able to travel, the young mother took both her children—Gina, the elder, being by that time some two years of age—and returned with them to the old house at San Donato, where the brief year of her happiness had been passed. From the first, little Richard was always weak and ailing, being in this, as well as in character, the completest contrast to his

sister, who flourished on the sea air like some vivid and exuberant flower. She was ever her mother's favourite, accompanying her from church to church and in all her charitable expeditions. The young widow spent a great part of her leisure in almsgiving; and it was one of Richard's earliest recollections—the figure of his black-robed mother, upon the steps of the village church, putting money for distribution into her little bright-eyed daughter's hand. In later years Gina inherited from her mother this habit of indiscriminate and lavish charity to the poor; but, even at that age, it was charity given with such secret, silent, unalterable feelings of contempt, it became an unbearable outrage to whoever could read the meaning of those great disdainful eyes. In a hundred ways the child resembled her grandfather. She had his same serene incapacity for tenderness, the same look of unconscious insolence. From the first her beauty was so great as to seem serious; there was some-

thing sombre about it—almost threatening, —of a character quite independent of her mood or her soul.

Among all the people who surrounded her and flattered her, the one she seemed to notice least was her younger brother; and yet there was never a time when Richard would not have given up whatever he most cherished to propitiate, or even to please, the beloved little tyrant. The pale, delicate boy worshipped his beautiful sister. He was made glad for the day if she so much as condescended to speak to him. He was not unhappy, having, in fact, been accustomed from his very earliest years to consider himself of very secondary consequence. Even his friends among the villagers, with whom he was always popular, had insensibly fallen into the same habit of thinking; so that the little neglected heir to the great house seemed in a fair way to grow up with a singularly deficient sense of his own position and importance. Even the misfortune of

his weak shoulder did not weigh upon him heavily. Nobody seemed to notice it, and the child's naturally sweet and affectionate temper made him tolerant and patient of the implied neglect.

One day, however, or rather one evening, when he was between eight and nine years old, he had wandered away by himself to the edge of the village, to see the fishing-boats come in. It was a favourite amusement of his. He knew the greater part of the fishermen by name, and who was still in debt for his boat, and who was counting upon a good catch to pay for the repairing of the sail. For all her prayers and almsgiving, his lady mother had never begun to find out so much of the village histories as were quite well-known parts of experience to her lonely sympathetic little son. He was looking on, then, with the greatest interest, at the contents of the first boat, and speculating knowingly as to what proportion of those shining silvery heaps of fish would

revert to each man, and trying to guess something of the probable profit of the haul from the smile which was lighting up the broad face of Marietta, young Antonio Bucci's sweetheart—when he was surprised by the sudden appearance of one of his mother's servants, who bade him breathlessly lose no time, but hasten back to the great house if he would save them all from scolding.

Little Richard looked down with a great deal of amusement at the footman's thin buckled shoes and fine silk stockings as they twinkled unwillingly across the loose rough shingle; and one or two of the younger fishermen left off work, and looked and laughed as well.

"You don't like it much, do you, Matteo?" he asked confidentially. "Lord bless you! *I* couldn't walk here if I wore such shoes." And then, with a sudden remembrance of other matters—but who was it who would scold him? he asked.

Father Faber knew where he was ; and he was doing no harm. He had indeed been playing by himself, down on the shore, since the hour at which he had finished lessons ; but there was nothing unusual in this. He often absented himself for half the day, without fear or prospect of interference from any one. If he came in late, no one knew of it but his old foster-nurse, Monica. As for his mother, he seldom saw her before the evening, and then but for a moment. At night the elders always played at cards—the Countess, her director, the Abbé de Châteauneuf, and good Father Faber. They played until one or two o'clock in the morning, sitting at a small round table at the far end of the great lighted drawing-room. It was a never-ending trial to Richard, the crossing of that long, shining, polished expanse of waxed floor, on which his own shadow was reflected vaguely as he kissed their hands for good-night. He asked now, rather timidly, if he were really late ?—if he

were being sent for to carry out some such neglected ceremony? But the servant, addressing him by his full title, only adjured his young lord to "make haste, a' God's sake!" and sped up the hill, leaving the boy to follow, wondering.

At the top of the terraced garden he paused, without well knowing why, to look back wistfully at the still shining plain of the sea. It was as if some secret instinct had awakened in him, to warn him that never again would he see that fair familiar landscape with the same untroubled eyes.

There was an unusual stir among the servants grouped about the doorway, who stood aside to let the boy pass, and their number seemed increased since morning, and out of all proportion to the modest requirements of that quiet house. But Richard had no time given him to feel surprise at these new apparitions in powder and small clothes, for, as he entered the hall, a door opened quickly at its farther end, and a

young man appeared, dressed in black. It was the Countess's director. He came forward rapidly, and took little Richard by the hand.

"I was as quick as I could be, Monsieur l'Abbé," the boy cried, looking up into his pale face with some wonder. It was not often that the stern young director seemed very clearly aware of the child's existence.

"Nay, I was not reproving you, my son," he said now, slowly eyeing the boy the while, with a curious expression upon his own face. He gave him no time for more questions, but, leading him across the hall, and still looking at him very hard, he bade him go into the great drawing-room, where his presence was wanted.

A servant ran forward obsequiously, to throw open the door. It was a mark of attention to which Richard was not accustomed, and he had time to think of this, and how it was probably not for himself but for the Abbé that the service was intended,

as he crossed the threshold of the room. Then he stood still.

For the first thing that he had seen on entering was his sister Gina, seated on a low stool, at the feet of a tall imposing looking stranger, of middle age, dressed in the uniform of a Colonel in the King's Guard. Gina was holding one of this visitor's large white hands in her own two small ones, and looking admiringly at its glittering rings; and either this, or the expectant look on Father Faber's rubicund face, or his mother's attitude as she sat, with a very unusual flush upon her pale cheek, fanning herself slowly in the high armchair,—in a word, something constrained and unfamiliar in the air of the room, made the child pause in his entrance. But the Abbé, who was still beside him, putting one hand upon his shoulder, thrust him hastily forward, crying out, "Here he is! I have the honour of presenting his grandson to the attention of M. le Marquis!"

This new comer, with the straight black brows and piercing eyes, was, then, the redoubtable grandfather, from Turin, of whom the boy had heard but vaguely, and whom he had never consciously seen. He had guessed as much almost before the priest had done speaking; and he now advanced towards him with a pretty air of confidence upon his face, and in his open childish glance. He had, indeed, never as yet experienced the sensation of fear, and would have approached anything or any one with the same friendly composure and calm.

But as he drew nearer, "Good God, madam! you had not prepared me for *this*!" the Marquis cried out, starting up suddenly, with every appearance of horror and rage, and tearing his white hand out of the little Gina's clasp. The spoiled child was too frightened to cry. She continued to sit on her little stool, gazing at her brother with fascinated terrified eyes. As for the boy, he stood still in the middle of

the great shining room, staring at his grandfather, and going red and pale by turns.

"M. le Marquis forgets that I have written to him. I have written to him more than once," the Contessa observed, in a very low voice, and shutting up her fan, which she laid before her on the table.

"It is evident M. le Marquis forgets," the Abbé added, in his smooth monotonous tones, and also speaking in French—they all did, for that matter; it being the universal custom among the higher classes in Piedmont at that time to affect a certain difficulty in making use of their mother tongue.

But the Marquis, continuing to eye Richard all over with the same hard, measuring glance, only broke out into a wilder fit of passionate upbraiding.

"It is to the King that I shall have to account for this, madam—to his Majesty, who was graciously pleased to appoint my grandson a page in the royal household.

A page, *sangdieu* ! Why, the boy's deformed ! He's a disgrace to us—a disgrace and misfortune to the whole family."

"My lord, my lord, 'disgrace' is a bitter word. And such misfortune as this. It comes from Heaven, and is not to be resented with impunity," said the Abbé, stepping forward and looking very stern.

"And, sure, after all, 'tis the poor little lad who will suffer longest for it. And 'tis an obedient little lad, and in time will make a scholar," cried out Father Faber, good-naturedly. And at this first word of affection or compassion little Richard felt his heart give a great passionate throb, and his eyes fill with tears.

But Monsieur le Marquis was in no mood to listen to priest or woman. "A scholar?" he repeated scornfully—"a San Donati a scholar? Now, by Our Lady, there has been too much priest-work here ! A scholar? Will you make of him a soldier, Father What's-your-name ? Will you teach him

how not to come creeping into a room, and how to straighten up his back ? ”

“ My name is Faber ; and I don’t work miracles,” the good-hearted Irish priest said, turning very red.

“ The boy’s a misfortune to us all, I tell you. Your son is the last of the San Donatis, madam, and he’s a monstrosity. He’s deformed ! ”

“ He is my son ! ” cried out the mother, starting up. All the blood had rushed to her face, which ordinarily looked as cold and pale and composed into a sort of rigidity as when they had brought her young husband back to her, dead. Her fair cheeks were flushed, her large eyes burning angrily. For an instant she seemed to have gone back to the vivid likeness of her youth, and it was the original of the painted goddess Diana who faced the three men suddenly, but a goddess at bay, with trembling lips and glances which flashed fire. She seemed only to have made one movement

before she stood fronting them all, panting a little, and with both arms thrown about her boy. So long as he lives, Richard will never forget the exquisite happiness of that moment: its rapture of protection, its sudden overwhelming revelation of love, or the touch of those quivering hands. "He's my son! and you make me regret—yes, you make me regret—that his father is not here to defend him!" the widow said very rapidly, meeting the old Marchese's cold, cruel look of scorn with an extremely stately and defiant air. "Yes," she said, "his father *was* afraid of you! You spoilt his life, and mine, and I bore it all in silence! I have always been silent. But, sir, you may be the Marchese San Donati, but I—I am the mother of my children! You may say that, if you choose, to his Majesty. Tell him that he took my husband from me, but it has pleased Heaven in this matter to be merciful. Even the King will not exact from me that I should give up my

poor *deformed* son!" And with that she took the child by the hand, and, making her father-in-law an extremely ceremonious curtsey, to which he responded with equal punctiliousness, my lady left the room.

She was still holding little Richard by the hand as she swept down the long passages with trembling footsteps, which bore her mechanically towards the private chapel. She seemed already almost to have forgotten his existence. The child looked up once or twice, dubiously, into her flushed and agitated face. As they drew near the chapel door, he paused, half timidly, and suddenly turned his head and pressed hot childish kisses upon his mother's hand.

"I know you love Gina best. I never knew, before, that I was a disgrace to you," the little lad said sorrowfully.

That day holds another beautiful memory for him, the memory of how his stately mother turned and blessed him, and, bending down, caught him to her heart and kissed his curly head before the open chapel door.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN WHICH RICHARD MEETS A FRIEND.

It was not long after this that the whole family moved to Turin. For a little while the boy grieved much over the separation from his beloved sea and his lost village acquaintances, but presently he had other things to think of.

For some weeks after his arrival he was continually being called away from lessons to be looked at and talked about by various strange gentlemen, who all spoke to him very kindly, and asked him a great many curious questions, and sat in great armchairs staring very hard at him, while he stood and walked before them. Some he saw very

often ; some came only once. He grew quite accustomed to their manner, and was very sorry, and even cried a little, when the last of the doctors patted him on the head and went away.

During this time the general household was being put upon quite a new footing ; it was much more splendid and important than he ever remembered it before. Richard had his own body-servant now, who followed him wherever he went, and for some months saw very little of Father Faber. The old Marchese was constantly employing the good Father's time in answering letters connected with matters at court. Once or twice, passing the study door, Richard had caught distant glimpses of them over this work—his grandfather seated in his favourite high chair, with his dogs at his feet, dictating to the priest. Visitors came for him at every hour of the day. Little Richard, waking in the night, would hear their coaches roll across the stones in the great court, and the

slamming of the carriage doors as the fine company drove away. It seemed, indeed, for a brief time, as if the Marchese Andrea was destined to win back his place in the royal favour. His new title of Marquis dated from that period. His Majesty had been most graciously pleased to offer him this mark of re-conquered favour, at the end of a private audience, in which the old Count had seen himself forced to refuse all possible appointments about the court for his unfortunate grandson.

The King received him, as was his custom, at six o'clock in the morning; at that time of year it was not yet daylight, and in all the sleeping city only the palace was lighted and awake. The same green and white damasked chairs furnished the council room. The new Marquis recognized them on the instant; it was nearly forty years since he had last seen them, and even in that moment of his triumph the past rose vividly before him, he saw the defeated

abdicated King pointing with trembling hand through the well-remembered window—and perhaps, for an instant, it may be that he, too, realized whither life had led him, and knew himself for an old man, whose only son was dead.

Possibly, it was this same seeing of visions which made him so unpopular. He belonged to another generation; he moved among shadows in a place where 'tis held to be always midday, and men live as if the sun might neither rise nor set. By-and-by, little Richard from his favourite post of observation in the deep window-seat at the far end of the long picture-gallery upstairs—little Richard saw fewer and fewer carriages come rolling into the courtyard. The house had suddenly returned to something even more deserted than its old quiet, and a dull settled melancholy—the hopeless sadness of things which have outlived themselves—seemed to pervade the whole place and make part of the at-

mosphere they breathed. The new Marquis had done well to rejoice in his advancement, for it was the last moment of such satisfaction he was destined to experience. From that day forward his decline in the royal favour was steady and complete.

Naturally enough, no one had thought of explaining the true reason of this change to the boy ; he only understood it years afterwards. At this time he saw less than ever of his mother, who was always either at Mass or absorbed in pious and charitable works ; and after the departure of the last friendly doctor, the child would have been lonely indeed but for his fortunate discovery of a new and wonderful world of books—books of strange thrilling adventure, full of beautiful verse which sung to him like the sea, which seemed to awake the soul in him to a new sense of life, making the little lad tremble and glow with surprise and delight.

He spent countless happy entranced hours poring over these wonders, perched on the

window-ledge at the end of the long gallery—a quaint, lonely little figure in dark old-fashioned dress. But one day, as he was sitting there as usual, his whole heart and soul absorbed in reading how the good knights rode forth to seek for the missing Rinaldo—as he sat there very quietly, he was startled by a sound of voices and of laughter on the stairs, and presently the Abbé de Châteauneuf appeared, smiling, and with him was a boy of about Richard's own age—a good-looking boy, with curly brown hair and very bright blue eyes. He was dressed quite differently from Richard. When he came in he was apparently speaking of something very amusing; for he was looking up into the priest's face with a very confidential air, and talking fast and laughing. He broke off his story abruptly at the sight of Richard, standing still in the middle of the long gallery and staring at him.

The Abbé, too, had stopped. He held his

snuff-box in his hand, and was looking from one boy to the other with his peculiar intelligent smile.

"Well, Richard," he said very deliberately, and speaking in English; "well, Richard my son, I have brought you a new acquaintance in the person of this young gentleman, who——"

"Oh, I say! I don't think it matters about introductions, you know," the newcomer interrupted cheerfully.

And to Richard's unbounded astonishment, the unapproachable Abbé only tapped his snuff-box and laughed. "Your uncle teaches you *la diplomatie à l'Anglaise*, young gentleman."

"He means that my uncle is the new Minister, Lord Kay, you know," the blue-eyed boy explained, turning and speaking to Richard. "I'm Nevil Marlowe. My uncle and your grandfather are friends. They sent me here to play with you. I'm staying with my uncle now to learn French

and Italian, and all that, but I'm going to Eton next half. I say, this is a jolly old place you live in. I can come every day if you like. I've nothing else to do."

"I should like it very much," said Richard, his face flushing all over.

"Your name's Richard, isn't it? I've got a pony, but—I don't suppose—I say, *can* you ride?" Nevil asked, eyeing him dubiously.

"Oh yes," said Richard, his face brightening; "only not for very long at a time, because it makes my back ache, don't you know."

Nevil nodded. In another minute he had clambered up on the window-ledge, and thrown his arm about the other boy's neck.

"Never mind, Dicky. It's a beastly shame—that's what it is. But we won't have the horses out to-day. We'll play at something. I say, Richard, what funny clothes you wear! What makes you wear a coat like that? When my uncle told me

to come here, wasn't I in a fright ? Wasn't I *just* ?" said Master Nevil solemnly, shaking his curly head. "I was not sure if you would understand anything. I thought it might be some new game for making me learn French—and I shouldn't have put up with that, *I* can tell you."

"But what would you have done?" the other boy demanded eagerly. He gazed at Nevil with eyes of deepest interest. "Suppose your uncle had made you come—and I couldn't speak English—what would you have done ?"

"Oh—well. What's the good of wondering over what hasn't happened ? I dare say I should have run away. Or—or—something. I should have done something !" Nevil declared with vague magnificence. "And French is such rot. What is the good of learning it ? Why, everybody speaks English ; everybody but a few foreign duffers. I don't see why everybody isn't made to speak English—by law. A fellow

wouldn't have to waste so much of his time then learning other things. Only I don't suppose they could ever make a law to get rid of Latin," he added, with another shake of his head.

"I suppose not," said Richard, beginning too to laugh. His book had dropped to the floor. He forgot that he had ever known what it was not to have this friend to talk to him. "I'm glad I do speak English. I had to learn it because I am a gentleman; and all gentlemen study things and go into the army and go to court. I don't see why. If I were grown up, I should go back to San Donato. When I am a man, I shall live in the country," he added, lowering his voice, and with a hesitating look at the priest, who had seated himself at some little distance from them, and was apparently absorbed in a book, taking no heed of their conversation. "I should like to live by the sea, you know, and have Father Faber to play to me on his violin."

“H—m,” said Nevil. “Look here. *My* father doesn’t go to court. And he isn’t in the army either.”

“Well, but, Nevil, all gentlemen are. I don’t see why, but they are,” Richard persisted, with much gravity.

“*My* father’s too busy. He goes down into the city every day and sits in his office. But I’d—I’d—— I tell you what it is, I’d punch anybody’s head who said my father wasn’t a gentleman,” said Nevil hotly, his face reddening, and his blue eyes beginning to flash.

Fortunately, at this critical juncture the door opened again. The Abbé gave one quick side glance up from his book, then went on reading steadily, with a quiet smile upon his face. There had come in a most beautiful little girl of about twelve, who proceeded to walk down the long hall with the greatest deliberation, and came and stood directly in front of Master Nevil.

“I am Gina. I came because they sent

me. But now that I am come, I hope you intend to make it amusing for me," she said, looking straight at him, and speaking in a very sweet, low voice. Her great eyes shone like stars between their long curling lashes; she had delicately pencilled black eyebrows, very remarkable in the face of a child; and her hair, too, was fine, and dark, and long, and floated about her bare shoulders like a dusky cloud. "I am Gina," she repeated, gazing at him solemnly with her great shining eyes,

If she had said, "I am the Princess Badoura," or "the Fairy Queen out of the last pantomime," the boy would scarcely have been surprised. And doubtless the little witch was perfectly well aware of the fact, and not a little flattered by it; for presently she began to laugh, and gave him her little hand with a wonderful air of stateliness and ceremony.

Within a quarter of an hour the three children were happily established in the old

window-seat, and Richard sat with his arm on Nevil's shoulder, and told the others wonderful stories of what he had found in his books; and Nevil, not to be outdone, capped these with still more marvellous legends of the Table Round; and from this, naturally enough, they fell to discussing the respective merits of their ponies, and altogether were exceedingly happy and content.

It was the beginning of a friendship between the two boys which nothing ever altered. Again and again there broke out fierce childish quarrels between his sister and his friend; for if one of them was imperious, it must be confessed that the other was not without a temper, and it was often but a stormy allegiance which he proffered to the little lady. Half a dozen times in the course of as many months Richard would be called upon to act as judge and arbiter between these two unquiet spirits, but nothing was ever known to

affect his own devotion to Nevil. It was his first and only friendship. It modified and influenced all the years of his youth. And, to Marlowe's credit be it said, it was warmly and very nearly reciprocated. The quick, careless, sunny-tempered lad made friends wherever he went, and loved and kept them, or quarrelled with them and forgot them, as the case might be, and with apparently equal facility. Only, as he would have said himself, there was something different about old Richard.

CHAPTER IX.

IN WHICH RICHARD VISITS THE GRAVE OF AN ENEMY.

WHEN Richard was about eighteen, he spent another summer at San Donato. It was more than a year then since he and Marlowe had met. Richard corresponded with him regularly, choosing by preference the old disused library as the place in which to write his letters. The Palazzo at San Donato stands on high ground, facing north and south. On one side the windows all overlook the principal piazza—the great house itself indeed forming one side, and that the most imposing, of the village square. The terraced gardens lie to the

north, a broad flight of stone steps leading down to them from the drawing-room *loggia*, and commanding a magnificent view of the mountains and the sea. The library is at the corner of the house, in the angle formed by the crossing of the village street, and from his window Richard commanded the neighbouring casements. There was one which it always gave him a particular pleasure to contemplate; he would wait, ensconced behind the heavy curtains, for hours, on a chance of seeing a hesitating hand push back the heavy wooden shutters as the afternoon sun crept higher up the wall, and a face look out shyly for a moment across the pots of flowering pinks.

She was always singing over her work when he first knew her. It was her voice which first attracted his attention—her voice stealing in at the open window through the silence of a long monotonous hot afternoon, making him look up from his writing to find a pair of dark innocent eyes

fixed full upon his face, with the curiosity and intentness of some young wild animal. Richard had seen the same expression of mingled audacity and fear in the eyes of a young horse not yet broken in and sniffing the air at the approach of a stranger, uncertain whether to charge him or to fly. He recognized her at once, although he had not seen her since she was a little child, as the daughter of the village sailmaker and repairer of damaged fishing-nets.

She held one of these great nets now across her knee, and as the young Count looked up and waved his hand to her with a smile, by way of greeting, she started, and let it fall together in a heap upon the ground. By the time she had picked it up again, her face and throat were all suffused with tremulous colour. She sat very still and rather stiffly, turning her shoulder a little away from the window, and never lifting her eyes again from her work, not even to see where it was on the window-ledge that she

had placed her scissors. She had made no other acknowledgment to the young master's friendly salutation; but what imaginable form of speech could have increased by a jot the matchless eloquence of those swift returning blushes? He who had evoked them felt himself no longer a boy, but a man. It was the first tribute ever paid to his personal importance, the first acknowledgment of his individual power and significance, and he never forgot the giver of that delicious flattery, nor ever will.

After that and for many weeks, scarcely a day passed without his contriving in some way to see her. They never spoke to one another, only, at the same hour, the opposite windows in either house were very sure to open, and two faces looked out—first into each other's eyes, and then away, far away, at the same ineffable lines of melting sky and sea.

On Sundays, they saw each other in the village church. On some pretext, Richard

had abandoned the lordly seats set aside for the use of the great people. He preferred kneeling by the door, behind one of the pillars. From thence, every Sunday morning, he could watch a little figure clad in a carefully washed cotton frock, go tripping up the aisle to join the circle of her village companions. A little yellow silk handkerchief covered her hair, and when a breeze came in at the open door, the light tissue lifted for an instant, and showed a tightly braided knot of hair, and the beginning of a delicate, round, sunburnt neck.

It was always Father Faber who said the office in the morning. After a while, the good old priest began to be struck with the edifying regularity with which his pupil followed the services at the village church, and that after having already heard high Mass at the Great House Chapel in the morning. One day he complimented him upon this fine pious ardour with a laugh.

“Sure, I’m thinking ’tis not every young

gentleman sets his tenantry so good an example, Richard my boy. But, faith! I was always accounted a fine preacher," the old Irishman said, eyeing his pupil very hard, and with an uncommonly humorous expression. "'Twould be a satisfaction to me, now, to have your opinion on some of the points of this morning's discourse. What I said about the dogma of the blessed atonement now? Perhaps, Richard, you could make it convaynient to repeat to me just a word or two of my remarks about the atonement?"

Richard turned very red. "I don't—I'm very sorry, Father Faber, I don't think I was listening. I did not hear a word of what you said."

"And may I inquire what you were doing then, young man?"

"I—I was thinking of something else," Richard confessed, getting redder still, and tormented by a great desire to laugh.

"H—m!" quoth Father Faber, taking

off his three-cornered hat and scratching his tonsure. "H—m !"

This conversation took place in the middle of the village street, just in front of the church steps. The old sailors had all rushed out in a body the instant Mass was over ; many stood about the piazza now, in knots of twos and threes, standing shoulder to shoulder without much talking, but all staring at the placid blue plain of the sea, comfortably conscious of a common interest in the little line of fishing-boats hauled upon the beach for their Sunday rest. The women were still thronging the church steps ; every now and then some young mother, more anxious than the rest, or some more notable housewife, detaching herself from the parti-coloured group, and disappearing into the open door of one of the houses.

The young girls walked slowly up and down, holding small paper fans in their hands, and each one wearing a red carnation

in her braided hair. They paused in their walk to drop a curtsy in passing to his reverence, and to the young master. Richard never looked up once ; but there was no need for his looking ; he knew well enough the outline of that little faded blue frock, and which head was sheltered beneath the dear silk handkerchief. He kept his eyes fixed on the back of one of the distant group of fishermen ; it was Antonio Bucci's back. Richard noticed particularly the patch of different coloured cloth upon the sleeve of his Sunday jacket. He could not have told if he had stood there for a minute or for a hundred hours, but he never forgot the look of the little projecting promontory, with its fringe of wind-blown trees, and the way the sun shone down upon the fishing-boats, and the glancing rippling water, and the way the men stood along the quay.

“ Ah ! ” said Father Faber, after a long pause. “ Ah, just so ! And now, me boy,

man at the best being but a poor mortal, 'tis time I got me some breakfast on this blessed day."

That very same evening, as he was coming back from a solitary walk by the shore, Richard met her for the first time alone, and spoke to her. He was passing behind the village, and at the end of one of the steep stony paths which lead up the hill beneath the olives, he came suddenly upon her, face to face. She was walking homeward, carrying a large green bundle of cut grass upon her head, and with her goats following leisurely behind her. The loose ends of the grass shaded her eyes. The young Count was close upon her before she saw him, and then she stepped hastily aside, against the bank, among the rougher stones, leaving him the whole of the narrow pathway; and he, too, stood still and looked at her.

"Don't you—don't you remember me, Isolina?" he said.

She turned her head a little to one side,

and plucked at a little withered branch of a rose bush that was entangled with the grass—the green bundle was spotted with fading blood red poppies. He could not see her eyes or hair ; the upper part of her face was all in shadow, but in that transparent shadow he saw her lips smile.

“Are those your goats?” he asked abruptly, going a step nearer.

She turned her head away a little more. “Yes, signor conte. They—they are goats that belong to my father.”

Her voice in speaking was uncertain, a little hoarse, as if she had some difficulty in commanding it.

“Did you—do you have to go far to find that grass?”

“No, signor conte. I got the most of it by Bucci’s house—up there,” she added, half turning and looking back up the path, with the gesture of a person accustomed to the ekeing out of insufficient speech with much dumb action.

“Ah, yes. . Yes, at Bucci’s,” Richard murmured, looking at her. .

For weeks, he had spent half his waking hours in writing verses about this young woman—poems in which he likened her to every wood nymph and fair shepherdess of the Armintha—and half his nights in dreaming of her as well ; and now——

The smaller of the two goats planted his four feet firmly in the middle of the path, and gave a plaintive long-drawn bleat. Then it came slowly forward to rub its head against the knee of its young mistress.

“They know you,” Richard said softly.

Isolina nodded. She pulled out a handful of the grass, and stooped and fed the eager animal ; and then Richard did the same. . The grass was full of bits of clover and little nameless white flowers which slipped between his fingers and fell upon the path at her feet. And neither of them seemed to think of anything to say. The goats went on cropping busily—there was

no other sound but that, and the low, lazy ripple of the sea.

Presently a bird gave a loud chirp from its nest somewhere above their heads in the motionless grey olives, and Richard let the grass he was holding fall upon the stones.

"I must go!" he spoke with a sudden incomprehensible sensation of being very much hurried. Then he looked at her once more; he could only see the lower part of her soft white face. "Good night, Isolina."

"Felicissima notte, signor conte."

"Wait a moment. You don't sing any more. I wanted to ask you why?" Richard added breathlessly. She only laughed. She bent her head with a sudden movement, like a startled deer, and turned and ran lightly down the rough winding pathway. Her goats followed, clattering upon the stones and bleating as they watched the swaying of the bundle of fodder. Richard went home, and sat up half the night looking out of his window at the sea.

The next morning he got up late. He was late over his books, Father Faber detaining him for a full hour longer with his Greek play; and when at length he reached the door of his dear library, 'twas but to find his sacred privacy invaded. The great window stood wide open—there was no question of sheltering curtains *now*—and in the stream of light which came pouring in from the clear summer day were seated several figures. One of them was the lad's grandfather. And, standing with his back to the light, he saw the dark figure of the French Abbé; he was leaning over a chair, talking to a little old man, very carefully dressed, whom Richard recognized instantly, for having once seen him at Turin, as the Baron Viani.

He gave one quick desperate glance out of window; he saw the flowers in her pots, and her empty chair, with the great red net flung hastily across it, but she herself was not there. And then he turned and faced his grandfather's eyes.

Monsieur le Marquis was looking at him intently, with his head a little on one side; curiously, as he would have considered a new picture.

“Well, boy! the cage is still there—but the bird, and a pretty little singing bird it is, *par ma foi!*—the bird has flown. I fear it was our voices frightened it. We haven’t this young gentleman’s secrets for bird-catching, eh, Baron?”

“Sir!” cried out Richard, getting redder still, but advancing towards his grandfather with his head up, and a very resolute manner. “Sir,—my lord,—you have no right to speak of that—that young girl in such a manner.”

“No right, eh? And pray who will prevent me, then?” demanded the old Marquis in his polite high-pitched voice, leaning back in his great chair, and eyeing his grandson from under his straight black brows. “Who will prevent it, eh, little Richard?”

The poor boy turned white, but his eyes flashed fire. "I have never spoken to her but once. Upon my honour, I never did. Monsieur l'Abbé, you know if I have ever spoken to her!" he said, in a choked voice.

The Abbé looked at him, smiling a little. "My dear Richard—— But you know I believe whatever you say."

"Monsieur l'Abbé, Monsieur l'Abbé, you are thinking of that little story concerning Venus and Vulcan. Faith! history repeats itself," remarked Richard's grandfather, with a little mocking laugh, tapping his snuff-box, and looking at the poor boy's shoulder. "I confess I had not expected this so soon; but time passes, Baron—ah! it passes." He finished his pinch of snuff slowly, looking at Richard as he flicked the last grain away. "Peste, mon garçon, vous chassez de race!" he said.

The Baron Viani moved uneasily upon his chair. "My dear San Donati, my dear

friend," he murmured, in a small dry voice, which ended in a little cough.

That same night Richard found himself in the coach starting for Turin. He never remembered anything about that journey, except the heat and the fact that the coach was stuffed full of straw. And presently, on reaching Turin, the lad fell into a high fever, from which it took him many weeks to recover, and during all which time Father Faber proved himself a most patient and devoted nurse.

Almost the first piece of news which was told him, as he still lay in bed, very weak, but getting better of the fever every day, was the marriage of his sister Gina to the Baron Viani. It was Father Faber who brought him word of the ceremony, which had taken place at San Donato some little time previously, and while Richard was still delirious and unconscious.

His first thought was of Nevil, then at Oxford, to whom the shock and disap-

pointment would be bitter ; and, presently growing a little stronger, he made shift to scrawl a few lines to his friend. But it was many months before he got any answer to that letter, and even then it only took the form of a brief comment.

The first time that he could leave his sick-room, it seemed to Richard that months—whole years—must have elapsed since he entered it. A hundred new desires and ambitions had awakened in him ; a hundred new thoughts had been his in the long dark watches of those feverish nights. He seemed at one step to have left behind him all the traditions and all the tremors of his childhood. The narrow local barriers of family and province had disappeared as it were in a night, and on every side were wider free horizons—a sudden sense of manhood, and the privilege of standing shoulder to shoulder with other men. For the first time in his life he felt himself no Piedmontese, but an Italian. Those

were the days in which men lowered their voices when they spoke of Venice. There was a wild intoxicating taste of liberty breathed in the common air.

Before very long, verses and even political pamphlets, written by stealth, printed on rough paper in pale ink, and strongly suspected at least of emanating from the Casa Donati, began to pass from hand to hand among a certain set of young Torinesi. And presently Father Faber began to wear an anxious worried look, which sat badly on his round rubicund face. Letters began to arrive from San Donato to the rebellious young heir—peremptory summons to return ; then equally imperious orders not to bestir himself. At length the Abbé de Château-neuf was dispatched thither, and doubtless with stringent directions to carry his point and take no refusal. But Richard, coming out and meeting the priest in the hall, only laughed at the summons.

“Tell my mother, with my love, that

she may count upon my doing nothing she need disapprove of—nothing to disgrace her name. And as for my grandfather, Monsieur l'Abbé," the young man said—"as for my grandfather, I present my compliments to Monsieur le Marquis. Tell him that I, too, take my own way in the world. Tell him *je chasse de race!*"

In a word, one and all, he defied them. To make a family *esclandre* was to fix upon the *casa* San Donati, the suspicion of a government which was never known to hold its hand, And it was upon this forced discretion that the young rebel counted—and with reason.

But in the very thick of his triumph came news to rob it of its sweetness. Going about, as was her wont, among her poor people, the Contessa Adelaïde had contracted a sort of low fever, which no one especially feared, which seemed to give no cause for much uneasiness, but of which nevertheless she presently sickened

and died. The same letter brought Richard news of his mother's death and of her funeral. This lady died as she had lived—alone;—being sensible to the last, but seemingly having nothing to say to the world before bidding it farewell. Neither of her children were near her. She had no intimate friends; she never complained; she did not seem unhappy. Her soul was like a sealed book to all about her; and when she died, her son felt that a lifelong hope of sometime drawing nearer to her had passed out of existence, leaving sorrow irremediable.

In the first poignancy of grief, he would have returned to San Donato, though at the cost of many humiliating submissions; but the letter to his grandfather, in which he signified this desire, remained for ever unanswered; and some months after the young man felt that he could not have written it again, nor indeed taken action upon it any longer.

Three or four years passed in this silence, the young Count holding no communication with his old home, nor indeed hearing any word of it, save such uncertain bits of information as came through servants, or the budget of news occasionally brought him by his old friend the priest. It was from Father Faber, now growing old and garrulous, but ever most kindly intentioned in his treatment of his former pupil, that Richard heard of the birth of his sister's son ; and, sometime subsequently, of the death of her ancient consort. Gina herself never wrote to him. It seemed as if his isolation from all the members of his own family was growing perpetual and irrevocable ; he was even in a way becoming reconciled to the idea (as in time a man will become reconciled to any loss, however impoverishing, and that by the mere fact of its daily repetition), when at last death again intervened, and the new Marquis received a letter from his late grandfather's

intendant, in which he was urgently requested to come down without delay, and take possession of his inheritance.

He chose to arrive unannounced. Where the train stopped, he took coach to the out-of-the-way village. There were one or two peasants in the vehicle with him, but they did not know him by sight, and, discovering that the pale-faced young gentleman was in no mood for conversation, talked quietly between themselves; of the crops and of the season's fishing; and one of them shook his head, and said he had heard there would be changes before long, away there, down by the sea at San Donato, for he had heard some say that at the great house the old padrone was dead. "I knew naught about him, I didn't; 'tis not in my parish," his neighbour answered slowly.

The old coach had still the same well-remembered smell of mouldy straw; and looking out of window, Richard recognized field after field and dusty waving hedge-

row ; and half a lifetime of associations sprang up again alive and awake at the first distant glimpse of the great white house, with its terraced gardens, and its ilex wood, and its olive-grown hills, and the sea.

Gina was there to receive him. The Signora Baronessa awaited her brother in the library upstairs, the servants said. And thither Richard went. As he opened the door, all the past of six years before rushed back upon him with a pang ; his first glance was across the room at the well-remembered window ; his first thought, a sudden half-smiling, half-tender remembrance of his little forgotten sweetheart.

But the curtains over the window were closed and drawn, and in front of them, holding her child by the hand, stood a figure dressed in black, bearing such an extraordinary likeness to the old picture of his mother, that at the first look the young man started back amazed.

She took a step or two forward, putting

out her hand. "Welcome home, brother!" she said, looking steadily at him with her great solemn shining eyes.

He had left a mere tall slip of a girl, and he met her again a woman and a mother, in the full blaze of her imperious beauty, and with the look and step of a queen. The more he watched her, the more splendid and surprising her beauty seemed to grow—a beauty as much of line and proportion as of colouring, and so unalterable in its character as to seem cruel. Her very way of speaking to her child was different from that of other women. When she put her arm about her boy, as she presently did, and lifted him upon her knee, there was far more suggestion of the suppressed strength in her movement than of the possible tenderness which inspired it. To watch her at any time was to forget all but her personal beauty; her mind provoked no speculation, and she lived in the midst of the passions which her presence excited, without seeming to be well aware of them.

"Our young lady is like one of the saints over the altar, who smile in their gold frames whether the candles are lighted or not, and whoever kneels before them," Richard's foster-mother, old Monica, had said. Gina had never known what it was to love any one. It was impossible to conceive that at any crisis of her life an expression of fear or of embarrassment could have troubled the magnificent repose of those lustrous inscrutable eyes.

Her brother had never realized this as vividly as now. Presently he told her of it, and she smiled.

"You, too, are changed. I should scarcely have known you. You are very much changed, Richard," she said, in her soft low voice, and looking at him curiously.

The delicate sensitive boy whom she remembered had grown into a pale, serious-looking man, conscious of his talent, and with a face indicating much intellectual preoccupation. Like most people who have

had a neglected and joyless childhood, he looked very much older than his years. It was only when he was playing with his little nephew, who indeed evinced the most marked liking towards him from the first, being never so happy as when perched on uncle Richard's knee — it was only at such moments that Gina could trace any likeness to the boy whom she remembered. She continued to observe him carefully, saying very little. She asked scarce any questions, and when he would have known something more of the manner of his grandfather's death, she bade him talk to Father Faber.

“He is dead. Why speak of it? He had his life; he was a very old man, nearly eighty. I was never afraid of him as you were, Richard; for you were afraid of him as a child. But I never cared for him. And now he, too, is gone. Dead! It seems as if death were in the air about us. It has come near me. I know it. I have touched it, and I hate it!” she said, shivering a

little, and touching with a reluctant finger the black folds of her gown.

Coming from Turin, the strangest thing to Richard about this old house was its silence. After a while he wandered into the rooms which had been his mother's. All things were left untouched; he saw her rosary, and a withered branch of olive still fastened to the curtain by her bedside, and under the silken canopy a picture, a Holy Family, hanging against the wall. Below this, and where the dead woman's eyes must have rested upon them every morning, was a whole row of little sacred images, blackened prints of saints, and emblems of crosses and bleeding hearts. And below these, again, were suspended some half-dozen miniatures. They were family portraits, but Richard did not know of whom. It gave him a fresh pang to feel thus unfamiliar, even with the names of those his mother had most cherished. The only face he recognized was that of his own

father. It hung a little way apart from the others. The Viscount was depicted in some fancy dress costume, holding a mask in his hand; the other hand, through some forgotten whim of painter or sitter, was resting on a skull; and the pale face, in its fantastic surroundings, seemed well enough to express the character of its weak, handsome, passionate and superstitious possessor. Richard took the miniature from its nail, intending to give it to Gina. But in these rooms the stillness grew oppressive. As he passed through the long, cool, darkened corridors, he could hear the clocks ticking in the empty rooms. The servants whom he met gazed at him curiously, as they made their respectful obeisance. He looked idly out of the windows as he passed, sometimes on one side into the empty village piazza, with its unforgotten houses, and the church, and the broken steps. At the other end he overlooked the terraced gardens. He saw the sea shining jubilant in the brilliant sunlight,

to the left the olive groves, to the right the dark wood of young ilxes, and beyond that the rocky cape, with its fringe of wind-blown trees against the sky shutting out the view. The grey olives stretched as far as he could see towards the mountains. As he looked out, the pain which he had not felt in her room fell upon him, and he seemed only then to realize that he had lost his mother, and fell to wondering sadly if indeed she might not now be able in some fashion to look down and understand at last what passion of grief her loss had wakened, what deep love had been borne for her, unuttered for such long years in one foolish, faithful heart.

One death had entirely obliterated the other. He thought of his grandfather scarce at all. He did not go near that wing of the house which the old man had inhabited, his chief feeling towards him being one of a wordless bitterness and resentment of the estrangement he had wrought.

Late in the afternoon he found himself in a part of the house where many of the rooms were shut, and some occupied by servants. He was looking about him, puzzled by the succession of doors, and trying to remember some of his old acquaintance with these upper galleries, when his attention was caught by the muffled, broken bark of a dog. He opened a door and looked in. It was a long room, with a table in the middle, on which were piles of linen. A small, brisk, middle-aged peasant woman in a cap was standing before them, turning over some napkins; but she let them all fall to the ground as she caught sight of the young master in the doorway, and ran forward, calling upon all the saints to bless him, and raining kisses upon his hands. It was his foster-mother, Monica.

“Gesú Maria! to think that my pretty boy should have remembered his old nurse on the very day of his home coming. My pretty boy!—and grown to be a man now,

and head and shoulders taller than when I saw him last. Vergine Santissima! to think that this should be my own boy whom I suckled. And so now you are the master of everything, my Richard. I call you *Riccardo mio*, and 'tis Signor Marchese, I should be saying. Well, well; to think he should have come to his old nurse the very first day."

She looked up into his face, smoothing the cuff of his coat sleeve with rough brown hands that trembled. She was a little woman, with a soft, white face, with small, fat, hanging cheeks, and black eyes full of fire.

"And so you are glad to see me again, old Monica? Indeed, I do believe that you are glad," the young man said, patting her plump shoulder, and his whole face breaking into a smile.

She shook her head and gave a little laugh like a girl, pressing the sleeve of his coat beneath her fingers. "And now that

my pretty lad has come home, he will make it his home for good? He will marry some beautiful young lady, and I shall hold his children on my knee," she said wistfully.

"I marry?" said Richard. "God forbid! Why, old Monica, I think you must have forgotten me! And you used to be such a clever old woman, too. I marry? And what do you suppose the beautiful young lady would say to this?" he asked lightly, touching his own shoulder. "Nay, I shall never marry. I think we have had marriages enough in the family; and since I have come here, it seems to me that I can do nothing better than stay and look after the estate for the future benefit of little Guido. He will make a fine, straight young Marchese in his time." And, indeed, within the last hour or two, he had seriously thought of the possibility of this plan.

"We are all in the hands of God," said Monica, looking at him and sighing.

The toothless old hound, stretched for

coolness' sake upon the brick floor beside the window, had been whimpering, as it were, in a whisper, and thumping his tail audibly against the ground, ever since Richard's entrance; and now, finding no notice was taken of him, he dragged himself painfully up upon his paralytic legs, and came shambling across the room to thrust his nose against the hand of his new master.

"Good Heavens! it is one of *his* dogs!" the young man cried, wondering.

The other one was dead, Monica said, but this one had followed the old Marchese about very nearly to the last. It could still watch by his chair when both man and dog had seemed very little more than shadows. "*He* died very slowly—the Lord have his soul in keeping! It seemed as if he would never give his consent to dying. He lived for three days after receiving the Blessed Sacraments. At the end, he seemed always waiting for some-

thing. But he asked for nothing ; for no one. You remember what a handsome man he was, my Richard—like the king. Well, all that was changed at the end. His face turned yellow ; he looked ready to fall to pieces ; and so weak, half the time we did not know what he was saying.” She stood silent, looking down and making the sign of the cross devoutly.

And then, dropping her voice still lower, “ You have to go and say a prayer over his grave. He was a hard master. But when all is said and done, you belonged to him. You must go and say one prayer for him, Richard, my dear.”

Richard made no answer. But he stayed there for nearly an hour, talking to the good old woman, and asking her questions about his mother. When he left, the old hound began whining again, licking his hand, and making a feeble effort to follow him through the door. The poor beast had not the strength to do it, and after a dozen steps lay

down, looking after his new master with dim, reproachful eyes.

Very early the next morning, before even the servants were stirring, Richard found his way to the village cemetery, where the last of the San Donatis were buried. The sweet sea air blew freshly in his face as he let himself quietly out by a side door; the water was of a pale silvery blue, and the opposite islands and the curving line of coast looked purple and unsubstantial, seeming to float upon the surface of the sleeping sea. As he gained the top of the hill, the sun was just striking the windows of the great house; he saw pane after pane of glass light up and glitter above the grove of young ilexes; he saw the thin white mist lift from the water and the waves roll with a gentle motion landward, their unbroken crests just tipped with rosy fire. The last fishing-boats were leaving the harbour; he stood still to watch one of them tack cautiously around the dark

headland, and followed it with his eyes until the white sail stood boldly out against the cool, pure blue of the sky.

The iron gate of the little cemetery was locked; it resisted all his efforts to open it. Another man could have vaulted over the wall. Richard threw himself down on the grass after a while, giving up the vain attempt of entering. He lay there for an hour or more, looking dreamily away at the noble stretch of silvery olive wood and curving shore and headland, but more than half unconscious of the objects upon which his gaze was resting, his mind filled with Heaven knows what thoughts.

Just within that iron grating the newest of those graves held one who had long been his worst enemy, one whose whole scheme of life was foreign to his nature; he had despised its rewards, thought meanly of its ambitions. And yet, such as it was, that other life had always influenced his; it had always made a difference.

He lay there with pale knitted brow and troubled face, looking down at the sea. His enemy was dead; the tyrant to whom all appeal had been useless—choked with the cold obstruction of his contempt. The heavy hands which had defrauded his youth of so much joy were all unnerved now; the pitiless lips were silenced. Richard glanced musingly up, touching with his hand the rusty scroll work of the iron gate. It was with the strangest mixture of emotions—of tolerance and revolt, of burning indignation and pity—that he recalled the old days, the old irretrievable past.

Little by little the worst bitterness departed from his meditations. There must always be a pang in such remembrance; and yet it was his kinsman who lay there, under that broken heap of sward. As old Monica had said, when all was done, yet Richard was of the same flesh and blood as the dead man, and belonged to him. An instinctive impulse of kindness, of forgive-

ness, sprang up in the lad's affectionate heart. Looking back on what he had suffered in his melancholy childhood, it now seemed more like some fatality and less the deliberate work of the hard old man's ill-will. And now—'twas ended. He remembered all that he had heard of the splendour, the prodigality, the restless ambition of the dead man's youth; and there were many stories Richard had been told in Turin by those who recalled the Marchese Andra in the days of his young expectations, and of which, before going thither, his grandson had no knowledge; and it came across him with a pang of generous pity, how he had heard this man's funeral oration pronounced, and in what terms! by the lips of a humble servant. To have grasped at so much only to end—here! Some old words came back to him. "*Quanto disio*," he muttered between his teeth—

“ . . . *Quanto disio*
Menò costoro al doloroso passo! ”

After a while he began to think of other things. He was twenty-four years old, and already his writing had won some little fame for him. He should never marry. No; he was the last of his name. He would never ask any woman to share in the misfortune of his existence. And now—now that he was at the head of the family, there would be some chance of helping on Nevil's marriage with Gina. He would write and ask the dear old boy to come and stay with him. And those two once married, it should go hard but they would bring some happier faces about the dear dreary old house. The dear old house; he had never realized before how much he cared for it. He rolled over now on his elbow, and looked down at it, standing on the opposite slope of the hill at the end of the village square, backed by its terraced gardens, and that noble wood of ilex stretching down to the edge of the flashing sea. There were figures now moving across the

upper terrace ; at his feet the life of the day and the village was awaking, and more figures—in bright colours these,—winding with slow precision in and out between the grey olives, among the scanty cornfields at the bottom of the hill. He looked at these last more intently, and presently recognized a village procession, and could distinguish the sharp tinkle of the bell and the high nasal intoning of the parish priest blessing the coming crops. He let them precede him down the narrow pathway leading to the village, and followed slowly after, listening dreamily to the tinkling promise of the little bell.

Seven years had passed since that morning—seven calm, busy, uneventful years. Richard had become a good landlord. He had lived much at San Donato ; he had passed a great deal of his time in Nevil Marlowe's society ; they had even travelled a little together. It was in order to join his

old friend on a somewhat longer expedition that Richard had now left home. They had appointed to meet in Tyrol.

Such were some of the antecedents of the man whom Clare Dillon had pledged herself to marry.

CHAPTER X.

ANOTHER WAY OF LOVE.

GOING down to breakfast a little late on the morning following her engagement, Clare was not a little pleased and touched to find beside her plate a large dewy bunch of a particular sort of gentian, which only grew in one end of the valley, at a considerable distance from the inn. It was while attempting to gather some of these flowers for her a week or two previously, that San Donati had slipped upon the rocks and hurt himself. The colour rose to her cheek, but she looked at him smiling.

“You have bought over your judge. If I take the flowers, how am I to find fault

with the imprudence?" she said, in a very low voice.

"I could not sleep for thinking of you," Richard answered simply; "so I got up at daybreak and went out for a walk—to think of you."

"You did not sleep? No; I could not sleep either," Clare murmured, bending her head on one side and looking down at the velvety blue of the flowers.

She did not feel embarrassed; no, this was not embarrassment which she felt, nor yet regret; but all her perceptions seemed keyed to the finest point of sensibility. A slight constant astonishment was all that she herself was personally conscious of feeling. Nothing which Richard said or looked escaped her; but if she attempted to realize her own sensations, all seemed to grow suddenly vague, to dissolve away into impalpable elusive mist. She became very silent.

After breakfast, he followed her upstairs to their small private sitting-room; Miss

Agatha Dillon was awaiting them there, standing by the window. She turned around at their entrance with a great look of agitation and expectation upon her sweet, anxious face, and Richard, going up to her with a very noble air, took one of her kind hands in his and kissed it.

“Will you not trust her happiness to me, dear lady?” he said simply. As the two women embraced, and Clare laid her golden head upon her sister’s shoulder, he stood watching them both with feelings of indescribable emotion—affection and happiness, a rapture of pride and tenderness, a poignancy of joy.

Whatever happened in the future, this hour had been his. *She* was his. The passionate faithful heart tasted the good of life at its completeness. It was her gift to him. Nor could such obligations ever be forgotten, or remembered with aught but gratitude and awe.

After a while, Clare stopped in the midst

of what she was saying, and looked hard at the elder woman's peaceful face.

"There is something on your mind; something you have not told me—you haven't told us!" she added, with a quick smiling glance at Richard. "Agatha, what is it? Tell me. You know you will have to tell me—you will have to ask my advice—in the end."

Miss Dillon smiled, laying her hands fondly upon the young girl's hair. "You presumptuous child!"

"Then I'm right. There is something, Agatha."

"There is something. But—Clare——"

"Will you send me away if you do not want me, Miss Dillon?"

Clare looked at him. "If it concerns me, why should you not hear it?" she said.

Agatha, too, made him a motion with her hand to be seated. She gazed at them both with kind melancholy eyes. "My Clare is right; why should you not listen to it?"

It was only a message I had to give you, child. There is no secret about it."

"A message, Agatha?"

"Yes, a message. It was from Mr. Clayton."

"Ah!" said Clare. She looked at Richard. He had picked up a book on the table, and was turning over its leaves with an absent air.

"He came in last night. It was before you returned. He came in to say good-bye to us both. He was leaving; he was suddenly called away, and obliged to leave early this morning. And he wished me to tell you, after he was gone, that, in reference to your last conversation, he should never accept your opinion that it was he who was mistaken. He particularly asked me to tell you this after he was gone."

"Ah!" said Clare again.

She strolled over to the window, and stood with her back to them, looking out.

"I see Lord Irwin coming down the

street, from the post-office. I had no idea the letters had come already, Agatha. It is later even than I thought." She stood still looking down at the knot of flowers on her breast. "So that is the message Mr. Clayton sent me? Well."

"I was afraid you would not like it, dear one."

"Does it annoy you, Clare? Do you mind?" asked Richard, getting up from his chair and coming to stand beside her.

She looked up into his face. "Yes; I am sorry. I think I am sorry. He belongs to the old life at home, and my father. And he came here because of us—because of me. I—yes, I am sorry."

Richard took her little white hand in his, and looked at it. Then he bent his head and kissed it. "Dear, it is not your fault. How is any man to keep from loving you?" he asked fondly.

But the girl only shook her head. "I wish it had not happened. Not to-day.

I wish I were sure of seeing him once again. After all, we were once good friends. I wish he had waited. I should like to have seen him once more," she said.

"But perhaps you may. I do not know where he is gone. He said nothing about his plans," Agatha added, looking at her a little anxiously.

"No!" said Clare, shaking her head.

Her companions were both silent for a moment, watching her. The wind, blowing softly in at the open window, swelled the white curtain, which moved with a rustling sound across the spotless wooden floor. Lord Irwin's voice was audible calling gaily to some one in an upper balcony; and then they heard him laugh and whistle to his dog.

"I wonder why Marlowe does not come back?" said Richard suddenly, turning around and speaking with that happy look still lingering upon his face.

"Yes. Where is Mr. Marlowe?"

"Agatha loves Mr. Marlowe. She knows him far better than I do. When those two are together I always feel myself *de trop*. I go away and leave them to their secret conferences," said Clare, smiling and looking at her sister. "Lord Irwin and Mr. Marlowe are both in love with her, but Mr. Marlowe is the favourite."

"My dear, my dear."

"I assure you it is quite true, Richard. I am not exaggerating in the least. When I came home so late last night, the first thing Agatha said to me was, 'I was not anxious, my Clare. I knew you were with Mr. Marlowe.' And every day for the last fortnight while he has been away she has mentioned him."

"I envy Nevil. I shall tell him so," said Richard, laughing.

"Hush, you foolish child!" said Miss Dillon, rising with a blush on her soft faded cheek, and crossing the room to where Clare was standing. She laid both hands upon

the young girl's shoulders, and looked into her face, and kissed her. "Mr. Marlowe is —— He reminds me of some one else I have known—when I was young. He has the face of an old friend, a dear old friend," Agatha said, "and that—that—yes, my Clare is right; that is why I love him."

She turned at the door and gave San Donati her thin white hand. "My Clare is all that I care for most in this world," she said, looking at the young man with her sweet, pathetic, penetrating glance.

"Indeed, I think your sister has the kindest face that I have ever seen," Richard declared, coming back to his place by the window and taking Clare's hand. "The saddest, kindest face. She has a look at times as if she had lost all the world, and found heaven in its place. I want unfamiliar words to describe her. She has the smile of a saint—enskied."

"She has been the good angel of all my life," said Clare, softly. "You know she is

only my half-sister. There are thirty years between us. And Agatha has been everything to me—mother and sister and friend.”

“I am glad she likes old Nevil. I wonder why the dear old boy doesn’t come? I suppose he stayed to look after those two forlorn damsels in the wood. But I wonder almost that he did not leave Irwin there to squire them? He might have brought you to me himself, Clare. I wish he had thought of it; good old Nevil.”

“I don’t think Mr. Marlowe meant to stay there.”

Richard laughed.

“Ah, you don’t know him yet. I want you to know him. There is a story about him which sometime I will tell you. I hoped that he might marry my sister. But I will tell you about it some other time. I wonder, now, when he is coming? But, of course, that must be what has kept him. Miss Armitage’s *beaux yeux* have proved irresistible.”

He was silent for a moment. He continued to watch her with smiling satisfied eyes. Clare had dressed herself in white that morning. She wore his knot of dark blue flowers on her breast, and from time to time she touched them with the tips of her fingers.

"I don't think you care very much for Nevil," he said suddenly.

"I? He is your friend. I like him very well. But I think he is changeable."

Richard looked up.

"*I* have no right to say so. To me he has been fidelity itself. I love that man, Clare. Hush! there he is—coming."

The footsteps passed by. "I wish he would come. You have infected me with your impatience. I feel in suspense. I wish he would come, and that we might have it over," she said, smiling and looking straight at him with her calm, honest gaze.

"And I," said Richard—"I feel as if

nothing now could ever be over. All my life long I have seen changes, cruel changes, in the things about me. I have been left very lonely, Clare. I have tried to console myself with work; last night you, too, told me that I could do it. I have tried. But I will tell you one thing that I have discovered—you cannot kill sorrow. At the best you can but leave it to die unwatched. I have tried what people are pleased to call the consolations of art," he said, "and I have tested the theory that sorrow loses its pang translated into artistic expression. As well say that sound is less because of its echo. I had asked all from life. It was bitter work learning that the best—the best I could expect was—consolation. Bitter work."

He looked down at the ground sighing. "Did you ever read 'Alfred de Musset,' Clare?"

"Yes, Richard, surely."

"Do you remember where he says, 'Pour

dormir tranquil il ne faut avoir jamais fait certains rêves'? I was dreaming when I first saw you, but you woke me. I think it was the sunlight shining on your dear golden hair. The first time I saw you, Clare, was in the morning. I think I have loved you from that first moment."

"You were standing in the doorway," said Clare, "when we arrived."

"I loved you from that moment. You are not only to me the woman I love, you are love itself. You are my religion, and the only thing makes life endurable. I told you that I feel now as if nothing could ever come to an end, and it is you, Clare, who make me feel it. Since I have known you, I have felt that the soul of a man can contain the infinite. I, who have always lived apart, waiting to be consulted by others, with no concerns of my own—I have felt myself taken possession of, disposed of, by a personal passion. I have lost myself; I have stepped out of life into eternity. I have incurred

to you 'the greatest debt of joy.'" He stopped suddenly. "Clare."

"Yes, Richard."

"I never meant to ask you to marry me, little Clare."

"Did you not, Richard?"

"I used to watch you and wonder what would become of you. I had an idea that perhaps, years hence, I might go and see you one day, and sit peacefully by your side for an hour, and tell you of my old love for you—of what it had been in my life. I thought some day I might thank you for all that you had revealed to me. Far or near, I was yours. But I never expected happiness; I never expected it."

"But you are happy, Richard?"

He smiled, and pressed her hand without speaking. "Tell me, Clare," he added presently, "about this Mr. Clayton. Do you really care about his leaving so abruptly? I dislike the idea of any one doing what might annoy you."

"I care," said Clare, "exactly so much as I told you. I wanted to see him again once; I should have wished to bid him a kinder good-bye. I was sorry for him. He asked me to marry him in England, before we came here, Richard."

"Yes, I know; your sister told me."

"And I think he was fond of me, in his way. That is the exact state of things. I am glad Agatha told you. Whatever comes between us, I should like you always to know everything. Whatever happens, Richard, trust me," she said, with another quick glance of her calm, steadfast eyes.

"Nay, what should happen?" Richard answered, smiling.

It was nearly dark before Nevil Marlowe returned. They overtook him on the high road, at a little distance from the village. He was walking very slowly, and striking at the weeds beside the path with his stick. He started perceptibly at the sound of Richard's greeting.

“Why, Nevil, boy, is that you? Give an account of yourself, sir! We have been expecting you since morning.”

“Ah, I half meant to stay where I was and send for Irwin to join me. I thought of going up one or two mountains on that further range; but, you see, I have done nothing of the sort. I have come back,” said Marlowe, slowly, turning around and staring at him.

“Nevil, is anything the matter? You were creeping along. You look as if you had seen a ghost.”

“Matter? No. What should be the matter?—Miss Dillon, I beg your pardon for not recognizing you. I hope you got home quite safely.”

He looked keenly at her through the dusk, and then stood still; he put his hand on Richard's shoulder and gave a short laugh. “I think—I think things have gone well between you two,” he said very gently. “Miss Dillon, Dick and I are more like two

brothers than mere friends. I am very glad of this. I cannot tell you how glad." He looked at the young girl. "It was I who sent you home last night," he said suddenly.

They loitered back to the inn together, the three of them. For the first time that day Clare lost the ill-defined, intangible feeling of suspense or apprehension which had haunted her since she woke. She forgot it. She walked between the two young men, listening to their pleasant rambling talk of old times and places; it seemed as if each of them was equally anxious to include her in those reminiscences, to make her a part of that past.

As they reached the bridge by the mill, they stopped to look down at the foaming torrent. The mountains, which for the last half-hour had been of an ashen grey, were growing dark against a colourless sky; the pines had lost their form—they were massed into one equable sombre surface. The young people lingered on the bridge; every now

and then some peasant going homeward wished them a cheerful "Good night." On the long benches before the cottage doors were seated silent, comfortable rows of men and women. The very lights of the village shone with a simple friendly welcome.

Richard stood with his hand on Nevil's shoulder ; they were both hanging over some old story. Clare looked from one to the other of her companions. She was supremely content.

CHAPTER XI.

MARLOWE'S RESOLUTIONS.

"I SAY, Nevil, the Armitages are leaving."

"And a very good thing too, if you don't propose presenting Lady Kay with an American daughter-in-law, in which case I only hope I may be there to see the mutiny."

Lord Irwin laughed.

"Oh, my mother knows a nice girl when she sees one; and this one is charming, you know—perfectly charming. And, by George! she is clever enough for anything. She could twist us all around her little finger if she liked. But, look here, Nevil, it's four o'clock."

"Well, what of that?"

"Why, that guide was to have been here

at three—don't you remember? At three, sharp. You made the appointment yourself. He was coming to talk over matters and settle for to-morrow. I'll bet you what you please that he has thrown us over?"

"Very likely."

Lord Irwin stared, and then laughed again. "You *are* the most incomprehensible mortal. Why, it was you who suggested going. I never saw a man keener about anything than you were about this expedition a week ago; and now, when I tell you it's put off for another twenty-four hours, and with every chance of fresh snow, and the whole thing falling through, you sit there calmly smoking, and haven't a word to say for yourself. You *are* a queer chap, Nevil, I'll be blessed if you're not."

"I dare say."

"I say, San Donati, I wish you would just listen to this fellow!"

"Oh, mountain-climbing is all a delusion.

I've had enough of it. I'm sick of it," Marlowe said impatiently. He stood up and stretched his arms. They were lounging before the door of the inn, and he leaned his shoulder against the side of the house and stared at the nearest snow-peak. "I don't call those things mountains," he said contemptuously. "I shall go to Switzerland before long."

"You don't happen to know of any particularly desirable lunatic asylum on the way there? Some very comfortable place, with judicious treatment for patients who don't understand their own minds? As a relative, I feel it my duty to make the inquiry," remarked Lord Irwin. "You always were pretty good at contradicting yourself, Nevil; but I'll be shot if I ever saw another man so absolutely unreasonable as you have been any time this last fortnight. I say, old man, seriously, is there anything the matter? Are you ill?"

"Nothing in the world. I never felt

better in my life," said Marlowe, quickly. "Look here, Irwin, it is only July; let us go and look at something. I want to do something. I've never seen the Dutch pictures; have you? Let us go to Holland."

"I'm not going anywhere until I've had it out with that brute of a guide. I wish you would take a little more rational interest in things. I don't believe you have half taken it in how he is serving us," said the young lord doggedly, and with a very determined look.

"Which guide is it?" Richard asked, glancing up from a letter he was reading.

"Oh, Antonio Rossi. The young one, don't you know; the Italian. He is far and away the best of the lot for any really stiff work; and he knows it well enough, confound him! But I must say I gave him credit for behaving better. I must say I am surprised. As for Nevil, there, he makes a point of being astonished at nothing. He believes in nothing——"

"I?" said Nevil, turning his head sharply. "I believe that in six days the Lord made heaven and earth. And rested the seventh day. And while He was resting, the devil created the Italians."

Lord Irwin's ugly good-natured face grew serious. He looked first at his cousin and then at San Donati. "My dear fellow, you may be in as much of a bad temper as you please; there really should be limits to one's remarks—even between friends, you know."

Nevil also looked at Richard. "Oh, he knows I can't help having the very deuce of a temper. 'Tis the only excuse for treating certain people badly," he said, "that they have imagination enough to understand why."

But when my lord had strolled away, and still with rather a stiff and displeased expression, he left his place and went and sat upon the bench beside Richard. And San Donati laid his hand in the old boyish

fashion upon Nevil's shoulder, and looked at him in the face, and said—

“Tell me what is the trouble, Nevil, boy? Irwin is right; you have not been like yourself lately—you haven't, indeed. Why, even Clare has noticed.”

“Has she?” said Nevil. “Richard, what a good old fellow you are. Irwin is a very good sort of chap, too; but you are the very best fellow I ever met, I think. I'm very glad for your good luck, do you know? I haven't said much about it, but I am glad—very glad. You believe that, don't you?”

“Surely,” said Richard, wondering.

“If ever a man deserved his good fortune, you have done it. And you won it fairly, too.” He clasped both hands behind his head and sat staring at the ground. “And now,” he said, “when are you to be married?”

“I don't know—soon, I think. They will go back to England first, and I want

Clare—I want them both—to stop at San Donato on their way. And you will come too, Nevil.”

“Shall I? I don’t know. But you are right to be married soon, Richard. Don’t have a long engagement.”

“Not if I can help it. But Clare has set her heart upon going to the Friul. That is your fault,” Richard said, smiling; “it was your talking of it the other night which suggested the idea. You must go with us there as guide. Perhaps I may even have to ask you to take my place altogether.”

“Your place!”

“Yes. Don’t say anything before Clare yet. Nothing is decided; but it is just possible I may have to go back to San Donato unexpectedly. There are some things there that seem going wrong—some leases; I got a letter about it this morning. But don’t speak of it yet. I don’t want to go.”

He, too, leaned his head back against the

house and looked dreamily away at the opposite line of mountains.

"No," he said slowly, "I don't want to go. And yet I am curiously anxious—impatient—to see her there, once, in the old house."

He made a very long pause, and then, just as Nevil was beginning to speak of something else, he suddenly added, "The more a man claims from life the more crushing are its refusals. I've had some hard days in that old home, Nevil, boy. Strange! is it not, how life can transfigure itself before one? I worshipped liberty there; I longed for it in vain. I sought freedom from myself in study, in ambition, at last in resignation; and, fool that I was, I never understood that I could only find it in love!"

Nevil glanced at him, at his pale rapt face and gleaming eyes, and then looked down at the ground again without speaking.

"Ah," Richard said, "I never meant to

marry. God knows I did not. But—
Clare——”

Nevil laughed.

“Ay, Clare! Clare is different. You’ll let me call her that after you are married, old fellow? She is to be my sister, you know, when you are married.”

“She is your sister now,” said Richard, quickly. “Nothing—nothing could make me happier than to see you two good friends.”

And Clare appearing in the doorway at that moment, he went up to her and took her by the hand. “We were talking of you, Nevil and I. And I was making a promise in your name,” he told her, smiling.

She stood still, looking first at one and then at the other.

“I came to ask if you care to go for a walk, Richard?”

“Ask Nevil. I am going to write letters. I shall be enormously busy. Ask Nevil to take you. He will walk further than I

should, and you know you always want to go further. You are never satisfied with what you have done," he said, looking down at her with his fond tender smile.

She was carrying a red parasol that day. He watched her little figure move down the road until the vivid scarlet dwindled to a mere speck of colour. It was the same way he had watched her walking once before ; but with what different eyes ! with what different emotions ! As he had told Nevil, for him there was new earth created—a new heaven. He lived in a transfigured world.

It was the first time those other two had chanced to find themselves alone together since their talk that day upon the mountain. Marlowe thought of this at once (and so very likely did she), but he said nothing, having, indeed, resolved within himself, in the course of sundry meditations on the subject, to be very careful in future in what he said to Clare. Above all, he was determined to avoid personal allusions.

He had come to this conclusion partly because he had been brought up all his life in a bad school, which trusted no woman entirely ; and partly because he was pleased to think that he could only half trust himself. Behind all his whims and follies this man had yet a conscience, and it was only by pretending that he was born untrustworthy, and therefore not to be held responsible, that he could account to himself for a hundred bits of self-indulgence.

He had come to this resolution while he was away from her—while he was thinking of her ; but they had not got even so far as the edge of the wood before he had forgotten all about it. She looked so calm, so simple and good. He forgot everything but the pleasure of being with her. The affectionate boyish side of his nature was awakened—brought into play. He talked to her as he had not felt inclined to talk to any woman for years, and with a perfect simplicity.

Soon after entering the wood, they had

reached the edge of the stream. Clare walked on in front, following the narrow footpath, and moving lightly and steadily over the moss-grown stones. At the end of the valley, the river widens as it turns. A fresher air, a cool moist wind blew in their faces. Clare seated herself upon a rock, and took off her hat. The ice-green, ice-cold torrent rushed past them with a joyous sound; and about, behind, overhead, the dark pines covered the mountains. From where they sat they could see but one bare grey summit; everywhere else were only sombre motionless trees.

"I wonder why it is one never tires of watching running water? I should be content to stay here always. I wonder why?" Clare said, after a long pause.

He turned his face towards her. "There is a scientific reason for that, I believe. But I fancy myself it is because it prevents one from thinking. As I sit here, I am conscious of neither past nor future.

And the present is very little more than a pleasant sense of cool untiring motion. Yes, it prevents thinking. I know of nothing else which serves the purpose half so well."

"You speak as if that were a thing to be desired," Clare observed, looking at him with a certain expression of wonder in her large tranquil eyes.

"And is it not?"

"But why? Surely, Mr. Marlowe—— But I do not understand why any one—— why you——should wish to lose the sense of reality in what has gone any more than in what is coming? It is very curious to me."

"That is only because you are very young and ignorant of many things in life," Marlowe said slowly, fixing his eyes upon the hurrying, rippling, sparkling water.

The tone of his voice robbed the speech of its apparent bluntness. Clare laughed. "No; I suppose it is true. I suppose I am ignorant," she said.

"You are—you are one of the women who help to keep up the old tradition," said Nevil, speaking in a very low voice. "When I think of her, I fancy my poor mother must have been something like you when she was a girl." He had been leaning on one elbow, but now he sat up abruptly, and took off his hat, and rubbed his hand over his thick curly hair. "Richard tells me you are going across the Friul when you leave here, and so on down to San Donato. It's a fine old place. I know it well. You will like it; you will like living there."

"Yes. I suppose you have often been there to see Richard, Mr. Marlowe?"

"I have been there. I have been more or less wherever Richard was since we were boys together, Miss Dillon."

"That reminds me of something which I wished to ask you. I have wanted to speak to you about it very much. But now——"
She hesitated.

"Now?"

“I think I am rather frightened!” she said, her cheeks flushing, and still looking at him with her sweet candid smile. “I wanted to tell you that, for some little time past, since—since I was engaged to Richard, it has seemed to me that you take less pleasure in being with him. I seem to have come between you. I am sure it is not only my fancy, for I have asked Richard, and he could not deny it. I seem to have come between you; and that is not my wish, Mr. Marlowe—believe me, it is not. You are his best friend. If anything happened to estrange you, think—think what a difference it would make to him!”

She was silent for a moment.

“He has not so many pleasures in life,” she said slowly, “he has not so many comforts that he should be called upon to lose this. And I—I should never forgive myself,” she added, sinking her voice.

She was speaking of this man, whom she was so soon to marry, as if she pitied him,

not as if she loved him. Nevil saw this at once. He saw at the same instant that she was entirely unconscious of it—of all that her innocent speech revealed.

She must have misunderstood his silence, for she added quickly, "Perhaps it is only the ignorance you were speaking of which has made me say this to you? Ought I not to have spoken? Mr. Marlowe, I would do anything to save Richard from pain."

"Yes," said Nevil.

The low pathetic tones of her voice seemed to pierce their way into his innermost heart. "Yes!" he said, and looked at her with eyes glowing with a fire of affection and pity well-nigh as pure as her own. As some women kindle passion about them, so this girl seemed to have the gift of evoking and kindling the nobler emotions of men. To listen to her in certain moods was to be fired to a generous emulation. The highest motives seemed in her presence the most perfectly natural—and there was an atmo-

sphere of sweet directness and strength of purpose about her in which no mean desires or precautions might endure. As Nevil looked up into her face, with its clear smile and shining crown of hair, she seemed indeed to his quickly touched imagination like a being apart, and sacred. It was as to Richard's wife, as to his own sister, that he said—

“Believe me, I, too, would do anything for Richard. He is such a dear good fellow, Miss Dillon. Don't think it presumptuous of me to say it, but, indeed, it is hardly possible you should know him yet as well as I—his generosity, his patience, his kindness to all about him. You say I am his best friend; but, indeed, it is always he who has stood by me.” He looked away at the river, smiling. “When we were both little chaps, and used to tell one another stories at night before we went to sleep, I always fancied Richard must be like one of the knights errant whom he talked about.

Always, don't you know, on the quest for something unattainable ; always just a little different from every one else—attuned to finer issues and more constitutionally incapable of failure or change. I thought him like a prince," Nevil said, with a sudden change of expression, and a half-mocking smile in his bright blue eyes, "'For Cæsar cannot live to be ungentle.' At least, I see now that was what I thought him. I dare say in those days I should have been puzzled enough to put it into words. 'Tis only as one gets older that one learns how to explain one's preferences in appropriately pretty language. No doubt one has learned to think more of one's self by that time and less of the preference."

He picked up a handful of the loose shingle, and threw one pebble after another deliberately into the river. "Yes, he has the nature of a prince."

Clare looked at him with glowing cheeks. "Mr. Marlowe, I cannot tell you how happy

you make me ; how glad I am to hear you say it ! It is not you that are presumptuous ; it was I," she said, smiling. " What right had I to judge of your old friendship ? See ! I will make you my confession : in my heart I have been calling you changeable and—and arbitrary. I think I resented it for Richard's sake more even than for myself.' With a sudden impulse she turned and gave him her little hand. She looked at him with parted lips and eager shining eyes. " But that is all over now, is it not ; and we are good friends ? Mr. Marlowe, you always say what I most want to hear ; I always leave you feeling happy."

As they walked homeward, it was his turn to be silent. When they came within sight of the inn, he took out his watch. " And you are sure, perfectly sure, you don't mind walking that bit of the road alone, Miss Dillon ?"

Clare laughed.

" I am very sorry I let you come so far

with me since you have another engagement. You should have told me of it sooner. Now, please don't let me make you late." She gave him her hand again. "And we are friends, good friends, Mr. Marlowe?"

"Oh, certainly!" said Nevil, taking off his hat.

He hesitated a moment and stood there, looking at her. And she on her side made no movement to turn away. It seemed as if some secret instinct was at work warning them not to part in this fashion. And presently the young man broke out hastily into some half-incoherent speech. What right had she to infer—to conclude that his only object and occupation in life was how best to amuse himself? he demanded. "What right have you to consider that I would willingly accept a second-rate thing? I'll have the best of life—or nothing. There's a good deal of living to be got out of—having nothing!" he added, with a short laugh. "Yes; the best. If I don't deserve

it, at least I see it. I want it. I can appreciate it. And that sort of appréciation—well, it's very nearly a claim." He spoke eagerly, hurriedly, and in the midst of a half-finished sentence checked himself and partly turned away, cutting at the purple thistles with his stick. "You say that what you admire most in this world is justice, Miss Dillon. Well, at least remember that justice is impartial in its conclusions," he said quickly, and without looking at her.

When she left him, which she did in another moment, and making no sort of comment on his speech, he turned back abruptly into the wood. He had made use of the first pretext which occurred to him in order to leave her, and the moment that he found himself alone, he saw all the in consequence of his own conduct.

This did not prevent him from walking deliberately back to the place where they had sat by the stream; he had no difficulty in finding it; there were still the marks of their

footsteps on the fine river-sand. And there were other indications of her presence. The long frond of fern she had been playing with as she talked drooped its broken head ; where she sat, a flower or two had fallen from her dress. Nevil looked down at the crushed and fading blossoms. Nothing would have induced him to touch one of them. He looked all about him, and then up at the sky over the clear space of the river, where some very small pink-tinged clouds were floating at a vast height above the dark tops of the pines. A feeling of bitter distaste towards all that surrounded him, an obstinate disbelief in himself and in the worth of life, seemed to surge slowly up within him, as if from some hidden and poisoned spring which had its source far away in the fruitless and unforgotten years. The futility of all that he had longed for and striven for most madly in the past overcame him anew. The expression of his countenance was entirely altered. He was like a man who, holding

himself as cured of a long and tedious fever, should feel the deadly, unmistakable return of his ill. It was a chief instinct of his nature to shun all retrospection ; he lived among present things and for the immediate purpose of the hour.

He looked at the pink clouds for a little, then walked away a few paces and flung himself down upon the ground at the foot of a noble old pine, presently moving a little and covering his face with his arm.

He returned to the inn so late that Richard, meeting him in the corridor, stopped him to inquire where the deuce he had been? And Marlowe looked into his friend's face and laughed.

“My dear fellow, I am at this moment returning from the coaching office, where I have been gloating over Irwin's attempts to secure a carriage by speaking German, when his whole mind is devoted to the fact of Miss Armitage's departure. She was there too,” Nevil said, “and looking dis-

tractingly pretty in a new travelling dress from Worth. Her eyelashes are longer than ever. I admire her immensely. She is going back to Paris ; and I feel convinced that if spirits took form and substance, you would discover that she has a rose-coloured soul."

CHAPTER XII.

IN WHICH RICHARD GETS HIS OWN WAY.

THERE followed two or three peaceful, uneventful weeks—a time so quiet and so pleasant to all of them, and to Richard more especially, so brimming full with a still deep sense of joy, he will remember it while life lasts. It was one of those happy pauses which occur with a certain precision in the history of any particular group of friends—still bright day succeeding to day and bringing no sense of change, as if time were only moving in accordance to some hidden law of harmony. It was very uneventful; and yet the merest trifles served to content and amuse them. There was something very young in

all their enjoyment, an impulse of good fellowship, a feeling of irresponsibility which seemed to affect all their relations to one another.

It was, to a great extent, Lord Irwin who had effected this alteration. His lordship's untiring good humour and amiable unsatiable curiosity often had this result of moderating the most strained of situations. Wherever he went he seemed to take with him an inexhaustible supply of animal spirits and shrewd common-sense, which acted as a deterrent upon his friends' imaginations; and by persistently taking it for granted that all things are as they seem, he reduced the life about him to very simple conditions. The others pretended to laugh at him, and especially at his inveterate habit of collecting unnecessary information about whomever he met; but, in point of fact, his brilliant good humour was at once a relief and a resource for Nevil; and even Richard was conscious of its influence; it seemed to add a touch of

reality to his happiness, giving the security of common-place assent to his new dazzling visions of joy.

Two or three times a week the cousins would start off before daylight to make the ascent of some neighbouring peak. They never cared to wander far afield. And it became an established custom for the rest of the party to go and meet them on their return at one or other of the bridges on the torrent.

On one of these occasions, which Richard especially remembers, they had reached the trysting place a little earlier than usual. Agatha was with them. She sat by the side of the stream waiting, with her gentle hands folded upon her knee and with a peculiarly sweet and tranquil expression upon her fine, calm old face. And Richard lay upon the grass at Clare's feet, and looked from one to the other of his two dear ladies. He had been reading aloud to them, and the book—it was a volume of some recently published

novel, and belonged to Nevil—had dropped from his idle hand, and was lying there half open upon the grass, when Clare picked it up and returned it to him with some playful reproach.

“You are fast growing as lazy as the rest of us!” she said, laughing; “and how much writing have you done within the last fortnight, I should like to know?”

“Not a word. Clare, those fellows have gone up to the Hoher Spitz, where the big glacier is, you know. Should you not have liked to see it?”

“I? No.”

“I heard Nevil say last night it was not too difficult a climb for a woman. I almost wonder he did not suggest your going with them; it might have been arranged quite easily. And Irwin says it is the finest sight in all the valley.”

“Is it? Well, I hope they will enjoy it, then.”

“But, Clare, it was only the other day

you were telling Miss Marston that you could never get tired of climbing. You know there is nothing I care for half so much as your doing what best pleases you. You ought to know that by this time." He looked at her and lowered his voice. "The only regret that could touch me now would be to feel that I was standing between you and some pleasure. When I am prevented from enjoying, it is only a better reason for your having twice your share."

"Dear Richard, indeed I would rather stay here with you—I would indeed," Clare said, speaking with great affection.

But he only shook his head. "When it comes to your giving up what you like, I mean to judge for you," he said obstinately. It was a small thing, but it had a great and unforeseen effect upon their future; the trifling resolution which he came to at that moment was destined, by its consequences, to be the turning-point of both their lives. Naturally, he knew nothing about it. He

sat fluttering over the leaves of the book which he still held in his hands.

"Can you really read this stuff?" he asked abruptly. "Do you really mean that it does not weary you? Well, that seems strange. The great writers discovered passion amidst commonplaces, and these men—the men of this school—they seek and dwell upon the commonplace element in all passion. Why, if they have to describe a man parting from the woman he loves, they tell you how he dragged his eyes along the carpet, in what manner he held his hat; and the carpet or the hat represents their cleverness—they make it the point of the situation."

He tossed the neat little volume down upon the grass. "And yet—it's very well meant. It's very harmless," he said. "But, *Dio mio!* how can Nevil read such rubbish?"

"And I thought it such a pretty story," said Agatha, looking at him with a half-humorous, half-depreciatory smile.

"And so it is—a very pretty story,"

Richard answered, smiling back at her. "But, dear lady, you don't know how that sort of literary *marqueterie*, that irreproachable joiner's work, sends one back to the large admirable ease of old Italian art. It makes one proud to belong to a nation which once produced works of genius ; which now, they tell me, is given over to all that is tritely vulgar ; but which, thank Heaven, as a nation has never been cursed with mere cleverness—the smart crackling of thorns under a pot. 'Tis something still to have escaped that, to feel one's self safely either above or below."

"I think Mr. Marlowe is quite right in what he says of you, Richard. You may profess what principles you please, you are still an aristocrat at heart."

Richard shook his head. "No. Nevil is mistaken there. What I profess, I mean. No ! I think the element of flexibility was left out of my composition, and complaisance too modern a virtue for my liking. I can

give or I can take. I cannot, I will not, accept compromises."

He spoke with a curiously calm and stern look, which, for the moment, completely altered his expression, giving each of these women, at the same instant, the conviction that this man could on occasion show himself to be the master.

Clare was the first to answer. "I entirely agree with you, Richard," she said gravely.

"Clare agrees with you! that child agrees with you! And, indeed, you are but a pair of self-willed children and bent on defying Fate," Agatha cried, in her fond anxious way. There was thirty years' difference of age between herself and her young half-sister, and she ever considered her and spoke of her with something of a mother's care.

"Oh, there's a great deal of living to be got out of—having nothing," Clare added hastily.

She had scarcely spoken when she remembered where she first heard those words. Her

cheeks began to burn. She felt at the same instant that it would be impossible—very nearly a material impossibility—for her to quote Nevil again; she would not mention him—and it seemed they must surely recognize the ring of his voice in the mere wording of the phrase. She sat still, looking at the water; but that too reminded her——

While they were sitting thus, a beautiful collie dog came bounding across the bridge towards them, giving short quick barks of joy as he ran, and very nearly, in his excitement, hurling himself bodily down the steep bank and into the water.

“Here, Laddie, Laddie! Come here, good dog. Good Laddie!” cried Clare, laughing, and holding out her hand.

In another minute, or two they could see the dog’s master striding down the stony path from the village; he had something white in his hand.

“I bring the letters. I had to go for

them myself, to the post-office, as usual, while that lazy fellow, Nevil, was sitting at the inn drinking beer."

"I like that! And how about the pots I saw you ordering on your own account—eh?"

"Oh, that was for the good of the house!" my lord said, laughing. "Miss Clare, I wish we had persuaded you to go up with us. The glacier with the sun on it was really magnificent; and Nevil says you are no end of a good climber. I'm sure you would not have found it too hard work."

"I have brought you down some of the yellow Alpine poppies you said you wanted, Miss Dillon," Marlowe said, turning to Agatha. "I hope they are fresh enough. I put a root of them in the band of my hat, and—— Hallo! why, where the deuce *are* they, now?"

"Ah, I told you you'd lose 'em!" Irwin remarked triumphantly. "He would wear them in his hat. He said you told him that

was the proper way to carry botanical specimens, Miss Dillon."

"No. But, I say, that is a nuisance. Miss Dillon, I'm awfully sorry."

"I think Lord Irwin has them in his own hat," Clare remarked quietly; and at that my lord burst out into a great boyish shout of laughter.

"I've won my bet. Pay up, old man. Pay up now; no shirking!" he cried; while the dog Laddie circled about both of them, barking wildly, and Miss Dillon sat upon the bank and laughed at Nevil's expression of foolish discomfiture and surprise.

All this time Richard had been reading his letters. He put them in his pocket now, and said nothing about them. But later, as they were all strolling homewards, he made an opportunity to say to Clare quietly, "I have heard from Gina, at last."

"I thought so. Well?"

"Well, she sends you her love, you know. But she seems very much preoccupied with

other things. Her husband has been losing money again, it seems. He has been at his old tricks, and playing again, confound him !”

“What ! do you mean gambling ?”

“I mean gambling. I’m very sorry to hear it. I fear it is a bad business, Clare.”

“And—and does she say nothing else—I mean about us ?” Clare asked, after a moment of silence, and speaking rather wistfully.

Richard said, No ; there was very little else. But Clare must be patient, for his sake, and generous, and not mind his sister’s seeming indifference. Gina never was very expansive at any time. “Poor Gina ! She does not know you yet, my Clare,” he added, taking the girl’s little hand in his own, and looking down at her serious flushed young face with an air of infinite pride and tenderness. “When she has learned to know you, she will be very grateful to me for giving her such a friend and a sister. For you will make friends with her, my Clare, *non é vero* ? Poor girl, she has had a hard time of it, I

fear, and all her beauty and her imperial ways have served her but very little."

"I want very much to see her. Mr. Marlowe says she looks and moves like a goddess."

"What! did Nevil speak to you of *her*?" cried out Richard, looking very much astonished.

"Yes. Why should he not? He has spoken more than once of her."

"Nay, there is no reason why he should not; only—— Well, well, I thought he scarcely ever mentioned her. I forget how many years have passed since then. To me it seems only yesterday. Poor old Nevil! You could never guess how much trouble those two gave me at one time, Clare. I was ever being consulted as the head of the family, and my advice perpetually sought for and never taken. It was always I to whom the last appeals were made. Those two ended by making me feel myself an old man between them. I sat in judgment

like a reverend giver of the law, and expounded texts until I had half forgotten that any other attitude was possible. I spent my youth without knowing that I had it. *You* brought me the sense of that. You came to me like a revelation—like the sunshine, making all things beautiful; and though I had never known the great happiness of calling you my own, yet I should always have been the better, the more content, for having known you. At least,” the young man added, smiling, and looking very much moved—“at least, I too, should have been vouchsafed my vision of the angels, and had something to look back on, and possessed the remembrance of a matchless joy.”

He walked on for a moment or two in silence, with his eyes bent upon the ground and a peculiarly sweet, abstracted smile upon his pale face. Then he gave his head a little shake, and looked up suddenly. “I wish that were the only news I had to give you.

But, indeed, I have had other letters pressing me still more strongly to return to San Donato. It appears that there are papers I must sign, and no end of tiresome business to attend to. I shall have to get Nevil to see you both through the Friul without me, Clare."

"Don't go, Richard. Never mind the papers. Richard, let the papers be sent here."

"And the lawyer, and old Gian Battista, are they to come by post as well?"

"They need not come at all. I am sure there is no real need for it. You are like my dear old father. If ever we left home for a day he was sure to discover that the crops could not ripen properly, or the rain come down where it was wanted, unless he were there to look after things," said Clare, beginning to smile. Then she said very earnestly, "Take us with you, Richard. I don't care for the Friul any longer. Let us throw over all our plans and go."

"Would you do it, sweetheart? I believe

you would; but—— No, you are not to tempt me,” said Richard, looking down at her fondly. “Why, what would the village say if I did not give them due notice of the coming of their future lady and mistress? And my old nurse and housekeeper, Monica, Heaven knows when the dear old soul would ever forgive me! And there is Gina’s coming to arrange for.”

They had reached the door of the inn by this time; the others went on up the stairs, laughing together over some story of Lord Irwin’s. Richard stopped her on the threshold.

“It will only be for a few days; for a week or two at the most. And when I first get there, I shall be overwhelmed with business. Child, it would be idle telling you how I shall long for you and miss you.”

“Very well, Richard.”

The collie dog had come running back, and was wriggling in the shape of a comma about Clare’s feet, pressing his beautiful

heavy golden-brown head against her hand. She looked at Richard. "I will do whatever you and Agatha prefer," she said gently.

"My kind little Clare ! But, you know, I only want you to do this because it will amuse you. Heaven knows, I am not consulting my own wishes in the matter. But there is this time to be disposed of, and there seems nothing better to do with it. I may have to come often enough between you and the things which you care for ; but never of my own choice and will. And this walking tour will amuse you. You will enjoy it, my Clare ?"

Clare bent down, stroked the dog's head, and passed her little white hands over his shaggy coat. "I don't know. I don't care to go ; but I do not know why," she said.

CHAPTER XIII.

AN OLD STORY ABOUT A WOMAN.

AFTER dinner that night, Nevil went out, as he often did, to smoke his pipe, while taking a saunter up and down the village street. Presently Richard followed him. The moon was shining brightly on the long row of houses, with their wooden balconies, and on the little groups of white-sleeved peasant women, sitting chatting together, on the benches before the doors. The men were, for the most part, smoking around the long tables and drinking beer. Richard stopped for a moment to look in at one of the public-house windows, and one of the guides, a young handsome fellow, in Tyro-

lese dress, recognized him, and stepped forward, with his mug in his hand, to inquire if his Excellency the Herr Marquis had any orders ?

Richard said "No ;" but had he seen Mr. Marlowe pass that way ? And the young man rubbed his forehead with the back of his hand, and said that the younger Herr had spoken of engaging his services for a big ascent, either on the following Monday or Tuesday. He had not an idea where he was to be met with in the meanwhile, but would go immediately and find him if Richard pleased. And Richard thanked him again, in his slow, stiff, correct German, and expressed his intention of finding Mr. Marlowe for himself.

The moon shone even more brightly on the clear tumbling water of the torrent. Richard paused for a minute or two on the bridge, to see it rush by. He passed the last scattered houses, where the lights were already extinguished. He heard the animals

moving about behind the closed doors of the stables, and a cow lowing for its calf, with a disconsolate monotony. By the custom-house, at the foot of the first rise in the high road, a small dog rushed at him, barking furiously; and a man, who came out with a lantern, looked at him hard, and then up at the moon, and blew out his smoking candle, and touched his hat civilly, and said it was a beautiful night for a walk.

He found Marlowe seated on a green bank, at the foot of a weather-beaten crucifix, at the point where the two roads divide.

Richard came close to him, and stood in front of him before he either moved or spoke. Then at last he lifted up his head.

"Well, Richard," he said. "I knew it was you. I thought you were Irwin, at first; but I recognized your walk as far off as that last clump of trees. I believe I can see any distance."

"I ought to be easy enough to recognize,"

said Richard, with a slight shrug of his shoulders, laying both hands on the head of his stick, and looking first down at his friend, and then away across the valley at the blanched and shadowy masses of the mountains. A breath of warm wind stirred in his face. He took off his hat, and stood there bare-headed in the moonlight — a dark figure relieving with great distinctness against the clear luminous sky.

Marlowe very rarely noticed his friend's deformity. For one thing, he was accustomed to it; and partly from an instinctive dislike of disagreeable realities, and partly from great kindness of nature, he was indeed, seldom aware of the fact. Now, after a minute or two, he turned his head and moved uneasily.

"Sit down, old man. But, I say, Dick, what is the meaning of your being out here? I thought you were always taking a hand at whist, or holding skeins of embroidery silk, or—or nursing the cat; in

fact, making yourself generally useful and agreeable at this hour?"

Richard laughed. He sat down on the bank under the wooden cross, and took out his cigarette case. "It's no good offering you these, I know. By Jove! what a beautiful night! It might be Italy."

"Ay."

"How that moon must be shining down now on the old house at San Donato!—eh, Nevil? And on the sea. Somehow—it's curious—I never seemed to care so much about seeing the old place before."

"You were never going to show it to Miss Dillon before," Nevil said quietly.

"I hope Clare will care for it," said Richard, thrusting his arms under his head, and looking up at the sky. "Ah," he repeated, "it is beautiful. The man at the custom-house told me so. Curious, isn't it, that you and I should have no other words with which to express our sensations, which yet must be so different to his? With

a whole world of experience and associations on our side, we can say so little more—nothing more which really counts—about what moves us.”

“I suppose to most men a moonlight night is—a moonlight night. One gets a few sensations more or less, and the time passes. There may be a slight difference in their quality, I admit; but I dare say the poor devil down there has his own ideas on the subject.”

“Ah, but that is just it; the quality is the thing. After all, the ideas of a man are his moral skeleton; they determine his proportions.” He took another puff or two at his cigarette, and tossed it away on the road. “They determine his proportions; they have nothing to say to his grace, to what constitutes personal charm.”

Marlowe went on smoking for another minute or two in silence. Then he said—

“Look here. You did not come all the

way down here to tell me it was a beautiful night ; now, did you ? ”

“ No.”

“ Or to talk moonshine and German philosophy—which is very much the same sort of thing, I take it.”

“ No.”

“ Well, then, what is it ? If you have anything to say, in Heaven’s name get it over. Say it. I—I don’t mean to be rough, Richard ; but I am in the very devil of a temper to-night, and that is the truth. So don’t keep me in suspense. Out with it, there’s a good fellow.”

“ My dear Nevil,” said Richard kindly, and laying his hand on the other man’s shoulder ; “ my dear old boy, it isn’t like you to be falling into rages and going off by yourself to enjoy them. Has anybody vexed you ? What is the matter ? ”

“ Nobody has even thought of doing anything to vex me, and there’s nothing the matter. I’ve told you so twenty times

before. Except that I was born a fool, and I don't outgrow it. Very probably I shall die one. And now, change the subject. What is it you want to say to me?"

"I only wanted to ask you a question."

"Very well."

"I have been making arrangements to-day about that San Donato visit, and—and—oh, hang it all! Nevil, I want to know if you have any objection to meeting Gina?"

Richard was looking straight at him as he spoke, and he saw and noted—to be remembered long afterwards—the swift flash of surprise, and then the strange quick look of relief, which crossed Marlowe's face at the mention of that name. He could see his face very distinctly, only looking rather paler by reason of the moonlight.

"Gina?" he repeated, wondering.

"Ay; my sister Gina. I had a letter from her to-day. She is coming home again to be introduced to Clare. And I want to

know whether you would mind meeting her? 'Tis very old now, all that old story," Richard went on, seeing his friend hesitate, and with rather an ironical inflection in his voice, "and perhaps you may have forgotten a good part of it."

"No," said Nevil, between his teeth, "I have not forgotten."

"The question is, On what terms are you two to meet one another? and are you to meet at all?"

"Have you asked Gina herself?"

"I have asked Gina, and she assures me she will be charmed to see you. She says—— Well, never mind that; it's of no consequence. I never had any doubt about Gina's feelings; the question concerns not her, but you. In plain words, Nevil, are you, or are you not, in love with her still?"

"In plain words—No!"

Richard drew a long breath.

"So that is over at last, is it?" he said, in a very quiet, low voice.

"It has been over," Nevil said slowly, "since the morning you came in and told me she would marry Montenera. Do you remember that morning, at Venice? It isn't every man who can point out the exact time and spot where the love of a dozen years has fallen down dead at his feet. A dozen years? by Jove, yes! I wasn't twelve years old myself when I first began to devote myself to her and serve her. How I did love that girl, Richard! By Jove! you ought to know something about it! I gave you trouble enough about it at one time."

Richard said, "Yes. You were very troublesome. And so now that is all over."

"You ought to know. It was you gave me the *coup de grâce*. You came in and said a couple of words one fine morning, and all that I wanted, all I had waited for, and believed in, and—and worshipped, was over like—that!" He tapped the foot of the wooden cross with the pipe he had

taken out of his mouth when he began speaking. The stem snapped in two between his fingers, and fell with a tinkling sound at his feet. "Absit omen!" he cried out, breaking into a wild sort of laughter, with more of bitterness than of merriment in its sound. "But what is done is done. I care for her? Yes; I shall care for her, in a way, to my life's end. But Gina died for me in Venice. She is dead. Take me with you to San Donato, if you like, old fellow. She writes that she will be charmed to see me, does she? Well, I am ready to make my bow to the Signora Montenera."

"Poor Gina!" Richard said sadly; and looked away with the strangest pang at the undulating moonlit slopes, the peaceful grassy fields,—all the still equable beauty of the summer night. In his heart he was most sincerely rejoiced to hear of his friend's escape from the bondage of an unlucky passion; indeed, had matters been other-

wise, he could never have permitted this meeting, and was in duty bound to forego either the company of his friend or his sister; and yet, in the very moment of congratulating Nevil on this happy termination of an old trouble, the simplest words failed. A whole world of emotions, meetings, partings, mad hopes, and wilder regrets—all that long past in which he had ever enacted the *rôle* of spectator and trusty adviser, that passionate past which he alone seemed now to remember—rose, flickered before his eyes, and vanished; and as a man coming face to face with a ghost may be forced in one irresistible instant to question all appearances of reality, so, listening to his friend's bitter speech, Richard asked himself involuntarily if indeed this were the inevitable end? if love were of its very nature mortal, and, from the first, bore within itself the germ and principle of death?

He sighed. "Poor Gina — poor dear

Gina," he said absently. Probably at that moment he was thinking more of himself and of Clare than of his sister. But Nevil, knowing nothing of this, chose to feel aggrieved at this ejaculation, which he fancied to contain some implied censure upon himself. He resented it.

"I know what you mean. Irwin was speaking only the other night of Montenera; he hears all about his playing from some of the fellows at the embassy. And so *that* is what she chose!" he said bitterly and rapidly.

He muttered something between his teeth. A clod of broken earth lay near him; he spurned it aside savagely with his foot.

"And so our poor girl has come to that—to be pitied by the young fellows who dance at her balls! I think she is the proudest woman that ever lived. Dick, do you remember how she used to tyrannize over us both when we were schoolboys, while she was still a child, with all her

pretty hair floating over her shoulders?" He was silent for a moment, looking down at the ground. "Is she—is she as beautiful as ever, Richard? Has she changed? It is six years now, or more, since I have seen her. Does she look older?—but Gina's face would never change."

Richard said, No; he did not think that she had altered much. And then for some little time neither of them spoke. Each, in his own way, had gone back and was remembering the past.

Nevil Marlowe was the youngest son of a rich man in the city. His father married twice. The first Mrs. Marlowe was connected in every possible way with the fortunes of the House; her grandfather, her own father, her brothers and cousins, all occupied positions in the great family bank. It was an interest in that business that she brought to her husband as her dowry; and before she died she had the satisfaction of

seeing her eldest son, Charles, preparing himself to inherit, in due time, his father's share in the management. She left three children: this Charles; another son, Edward; and an only daughter, who married very young. She was a woman of a calm and methodic disposition, who fulfilled all her duties in life in a just and even manner; she treated her daily habits and pleasures as so many obligations, and rose at the same hour, and drove out at the same hour, and left cards at the proper houses, or if it was time to return a visit, stepped calmly out of her carriage and went in and called, with the same irreproachable amiability. When she died, her children and husband mourned their loss with as much grave and sincere propriety as if she had been still among them to regulate the measure of their affliction; and presently, but always in due time and season, Mr. Marlowe married again.

His second wife was another very pretty

woman—Nevil inherited that susceptibility to beauty from his father. She was the Lady Alicia Dane, Lord Kay's youngest sister, and very much spoiled, and extremely foolish, and good-natured, and irrepressible. She made not the slightest secret of her reasons for preferring a great establishment in London to the lonely and impoverished splendours of Danesleigh Court, her brother's place in Somerset. She talked over the whole affair with the utmost candour with her future sister-in-law, Margaret Marlowe, who was a plain, rather silent young woman of about her own age; and altogether treated this question of marrying a middle-aged banker for his money with such a mixture of good-humour and light-hearted cynicism and a certain smiling and impertinent frankness as to disarm all criticism. Her preparations were conducted very much in the spirit of some bright-winged bird intent on building itself a nest, and with no ulterior theories about the

materials which it collected. And Mr. Marlowe, for one, was more than satisfied with her gracious and capricious and self-engrossed personality.

She only lived two years after her marriage, during all of which time her violent tempered and domineering old husband constituted himself the slave of her merest whims—and they were many. She died shortly after the birth of her only child, Nevil. The boy was named after her favourite brother, and the only wish she expressed about him was that he should be brought up among her own people. She held her hand upon her husband's arm until she had heard him formally bind himself to carry out her desires as much as might be possible, and then sank back upon the pillows with a sigh of relief and a last look of gratification in her large, brilliant blue eyes.

"I have enjoyed myself exceedingly. Thank you so much," she said presently,

addressing herself this time to her sister-in-law, who was standing by the other side of her bed.

The nurses and doctors were all agreed afterwards that she must have been already a little off her head, poor lady ! and wandering, and only half conscious of what she said. But, however that might be, it is certain these were the last articulate words she spoke. She quitted life as she might have taken leave of some pleasant party ; and very soon there was nothing left to show of her presence in the world, but the wailing infant, and the blank bewilderment of sorrow on the face of the man who paced up and down—up and down—his study floor, all that night, and for many another weary night to come.

His daughter was already married ; his elder sons had interests, affairs, occupations, of their own ; presently the prosperous old family servants forgot their new training, and lapsed quietly back into the old routine.

The first Mrs. Marlowe's portrait still hung above the great sideboard in the dining-room—it would have been consigned upstairs to one of the corridors long ago by a scandalized upholsterer's assistant, but that Lady Alicia, meeting the little procession on the stairs, had stopped it, and gazed curiously enough at the painted effigy of her predecessor, and laughed in her careless way, asking what the poor portrait had done to be sent into banishment?

The question was addressed to her elderly *fiancé*, who looked exceedingly red and pompous and uncomfortable, and kept casting infuriated glances at the unfortunate assistant, while muttering something incoherent about “little necessary changes—the house wanted doing up—welcoming a bride.”

“Oh, 'tis just as you please! But you don't suppose not seeing *that* would make me forget you had been married?” my lady went on, pointing with her parasol at the

sedate and decorous image as it wavered in the shopman's arms, and breaking out into a gay impertinent little laugh.

And so the old portrait was returned to its place of honour, from whence it could now look down once more upon a household conducted with unexceptionable propriety. There was scarce any evidence left of the short new *régime*.

In accordance with the dead woman's wishes, little Nevil was brought up almost entirely among his mother's own people. His holidays were spent either in Italy with his uncle, Lord Kay, who was at that time and for many years subsequently British Ambassador at the Court of Turin, and one of the best known diners out and *raconteurs* of his day ; or the boy was sent down to the old family place at Danesleigh, to be with his cousin Irwin. He visited his father at stated intervals, it is true, the Danesleigh people being quite aware of the future importance to the lad of his keeping well up with his

only wealthy relatives ; but each time he went home it was only to discover afresh, and with almost the same wonder, how very little he had in common with those whose name he bore. This never failed to astonish the boy, already conscious of being a general favourite, fond of every one who was kind to him—and, indeed, meeting with very little else but affection and kindness. He was like another, and a preferred, son of the house down there in the country. Irwin was of quite secondary consequence to his handsome, imperious, attractive young cousin ; the honest fellow succumbed to Nevil's charm of manner very nearly from the day of their acquaintance, and was one of his first conquests and most faithful admirers.

Young Marlowe grew up, then, a sensitive, clever, generous, conceited lad, very impulsive and very soft-hearted. If he was a trifle spoiled, and capricious in consequence, it was not the kind simple people

who had achieved this result who would have been likely to notice it; but once in London, all the young fellow's good luck seemed absolutely to desert him. He could scarcely meet his own father without in some way offending the old man's habits and prejudices. His extravagance, his carelessness, his independence, his friendships, his wild political theories (which, it must be confessed, he chiefly learned from Richard), the very way in which he wore his coat, and gave an order to the servants, were so many subjects of secret irritations or open offence. His familiarity with what his father hotly despised and vaguely stigmatized as "foreign foolishness" was a perpetual provocation to fault-finding.

"My father hates 'abroad.' I believe he is beginning to hate me!" Nevil would say, in his wild way, to Richard. "He told me the other day that I had not a proper respect for money. It seems that I don't bow down enough in the house of

Rimmon. He would wish me to be like Charles, I suppose, or like Ned ; to bind my soul up with the ledgers, and let him lock it away with them in his patent safe. Yes, and then beg his head clerk to take charge of the key. Money? the whole house smells of money. We have it served up at every meal ; I can't ask for a piece of bread without being told some new fact about commerce or the Stock Exchange. I believe the governor dreams of bank-notes. Why, he's quarrelled with the only sister he ever had about money. They haven't spoken these fifteen years."

Richard suggested that perhaps on his side Mr. Marlowe might have something to complain of. By Nevil's own account it seemed as if all their ways and habits were in constant contradiction ; while, on the other hand, the elder sons——

"Then, why did he marry my mother if he didn't want me to be a gentleman?" Nevil broke out furiously. "He hates all

the Danesleigh people ! Why did he marry into our family, then ? He calls Irwin ‘ my lord.’ He would call you ‘ my lord,’ Dicky. No, by Jove ! he wouldn’t, though. I forgot ; you are only a miserable foreigner.”

This conversation, and it was only one of many of like character, took place in the long tapestried gallery where the pictures hang at Turin. Nevil had been walking wildly up and down as he talked, but now he came up to the window-seat and stood there, biting his nails and staring down at the motionless cypress trees in the garden below. “ By Jove ! ” he said, “ every time I go back I swear to myself that things shall be different. We’ll start fair and have no scenes. And every time it is different ; it get’s worse. By Jove ! when I think of it, it makes me so wretched and so ashamed and so—so worried, that I’d go and enlist to-morrow—if it was not for Gina. You needn’t laugh, Richard, for I’d do it, by Jove ! You don’t know how desperate I

am. And I've been here a fortnight this time and only seen her once, and—and—— It's all very well to say she is at her convent. I suppose she could come out of her convent, then, if your people only chose to let her? Most of them do come out on the great *fête* days, and I know there are three *festas* this week. I—I bought a Roman calendar on purpose to look, before I left Oxford," said Nevil, turning very red.

Presently, and while he was still at college, Richard wrote to tell him of Gina's marriage to the Baron Viani. It was a hard blow, and for a time Nevil believed the shock had cured him. Perhaps at this period of his career he even gave himself a few airs of understanding women and the world, and wrote a few scathing verses on fickleness and folly, and was, possibly, a little proud in secret of the suffering and disappointment which had made him so unmistakably a man. And then, after this first instinctive hardening of his heart,

how the old passion woke again, and ached, and refused to be comforted !

When next he met her, the old husband was dead and she a mother, a thousand times more beautiful than ever ; a woman now, and conscious of her fascinations. Heaven knows, she had small need of using any of them upon the poor lad whom she smiled upon and still called "Nevil." It is the oldest story in the world, and he went through every phase of it. She was simple and kind, imperious or melting ; she treated him with almost more familiarity than she did Richard, of whom sometimes she was pleased to say she was afraid ; and called Nevil her younger brother and sent him about her messages, or let him stay beside her half the day, or even sent him away altogether if the fancy took her. It was all the same to him. If she called him, he came. When she wanted him, he was there. . When he was not with her, he was talking about her to Richard,

or writing to her, or thinking of her. Whatever she might please to do derived all its import and value from the sole fact that she did it ; in a word, at that time his whole heart and soul were there, at her feet, hers to dispose of, to leave or to take. And she—left them.

One day,—it was at Venice, and he had been with her the better part of the afternoon,—she was going to a great ball that night at the Palazzo Montenera, to which he was not bidden ; and as, at last, he rose, reluctantly enough, to take leave of her, she laughed in her usual low fashion, and gave him her hand, bidding him come back in the evening if he liked ; he should give his opinion on the new ball-dress. “ And—bring Riccardo with you, Nevil ! ” she called out, looking over her shoulder at him as he already had his hand on the door. But when he returned in the evening, Richard had arrived before him ; he looked harassed and anxious, and spoke very little ;

to all of which Nevil paid no attention at the time, although he remembered it well enough afterwards. They stood, one on either side of the empty fireplace, and scarcely exchanging a word, until Gina entered. She came in, carrying in her hand some flowers which Marlowe had sent her. She tossed them carelessly down on a side table as she swept past it, and came and stood in front of the two young men with folded hands. "Will that do, brother?" she asked, fixing her great dark eyes curiously upon Richard.

Her hair and neck were a blaze of diamonds. Nevil had never seen her in full dress before. He broke out now with some wild ejaculation of wonder and delight over her beauty; but she made as if she had not heard him. "Will that do, Riccardo?" she asked a second time.

She only laughed with a little air of amused defiance when she saw he was determined not to answer her. "Well, as

you like. But tell them to get the gondola ready for me, then," she said, with perfect good humour. She let Nevil wrap her cloak carefully about her rose-marble shoulders, the gleaming dazzling shoulders of a goddess, and then when he would have handed her the flowers, she drew back a step or two and looked full at him, fixing her great eyes upon his face without a smile.

"Riccardo is angry with me on your account. Did you know that? He is always finding fault with me, always troubling me about you. What have you done for him that he should care so very much for your comfort? He calls it your happiness, by the way."

Nevil hung his head. "I don't know. No one has a right to blame you. It is not your fault that I love you; sometimes I think it is not even mine. A hundred and a hundred times I have vowed I would go away and leave you and never see

you again, Gina. And yet—how can I? Richard is right when he calls you my only happiness.”

She stood perfectly still, looking at him, with her lips half parted and her dark delicate eyebrows a little raised.

“It must be such an old story to you now! I don’t wonder that it wearies you to hear of it. You were a child when I began to love you first. I have loved you all your life—and it has made no difference!” the young fellow said hurriedly and desperately. It was very seldom that she did not cut him short in the middle of such a speech.

But on this occasion she showed no impatience, no wish to interrupt him. She waited until he had finished speaking. “Nay,” she said very kindly, “you undervalue yourself. You have made—some difference.”

After seven years he remembered the tone of her voice as she said it. She

came close up to him, and laid one warm, jewelled hand upon his wrist. "My dear Nevil," she went on, raising her dark inscrutable eyes to his troubled face, and considering him calmly, but with a great air of compassion, "as you say, I was but a child when I first discovered that you cared for me. And what good has it ever done you in all these years? To me it only seems to have served to make you most miserable. No!" she said, smiling, "don't protest. You could not change my opinion."

She paused a moment, then gave a little sigh. "When we were both children, I used to kiss you good-bye, I remember; and I always cried when you went back to school after the holidays. My poor boy," she said, quite suddenly, and putting her face quite close to his—"my poor boy, I am afraid a great many of your holidays are over!"

Almost before she had finished speaking,

he felt her warm breath and the touch of her lips upon his cheek. She kissed him, and then drew back and stood still for an instant, gazing at him; the lamplight flashed back from all her jewels and lit up her white neck and the unmoved unalterable beauty of her face.

Her lips were half parted; she breathed a little faster. Nevil's quick eye caught the uncertain rise and fall of the laces on her breast. His own breath seemed to choke him.

“Gina!”

But she smiled, and put up her white hand to her flashing necklace quite calmly; she wore a ring upon it which had been her mother's, and which he had known by sight any time these dozen years or more. “Good-bye, dear Nevil,” she said slowly. She let her eyelids fall. “Good-bye—brother.”

His rooms were nearly opposite her apartment, on the further side of the canal.

He went home, and threw himself into an armchair, and set up half the night in it, smoking and thinking. He felt no wish to sleep; he hardly wished himself with her; only, at intervals, her face rose clearly up before him against the darkness; he saw her the centre of an admiring ball, the brightest and most splendid thing in all the brilliant room. Then the vision faded away as it had come; he seemed to feel again the sweet warm touch of her lips upon his cheek, and he shut his eyes involuntarily, passing his hand across them.

The glare from the lantern at the *traghetto* steps was reflected in long dim streaks across his ceiling; he did not notice it consciously at the time; he never even observed that his own lamp was not lighted. To his dying day, the hours which followed will remain an isolated part of time in his memory—the long hours of that pale summer night, with their strange hopeless passion of love, and the sound of the

quarters striking, one after the other, on the Gesù clock. Her palace was opposite his windows. From his bed, as the dawn whitened, he heard the click of the gondoliers' oars, a loud splash of water, a laugh, and gay voices bidding one another "Buona notte e buon riposo;" and so was aware that she had returned home from her ball.

Then he fell asleep, and slept late, and was awakened from some happy peaceful dream by a touch on his shoulder.

It was Richard come to wake him. Nevil opened his eyes, and his heart gave a sudden leap and seemed to stand still. He knew at once, and without a shadow of hesitation, that something very serious was the matter.

"Well?" he said, sitting up in bed and staring at his visitor. "So it has come at last, has it? Well, what is it? Don't keep me in suspense, man. Speak!"

Richard sat down on the foot of the bed, and nodded his head two or three times. His face was pale and haggard, and his eyes

looked as if he had not slept. He sat with them fixed upon the floor; he avoided looking at his friend.

"Can't you speak?" Nevil asked again, his heart beating.

"I asked Gina last night to tell you, and she would not promise. I left you alone together on purpose. But I think she grows more and more like my grandfather. I cannot understand her. She does not want to be loved. I think she cares for nothing and for nobody in all the world, except for her boy," he said at last.

At the first mention of her name, Nevil was aware of a singular feeling, a sort of weight like a cold heavy hand passed across his forehead and then resting between his shoulders. It was over in an instant, and was succeeded by a great sensation of lightness and lucidity of mind; he felt as if he had emerged from some dark place into a large airy room, and felt himself perfectly disengaged and calm.

“What is it?” he said, fixing his eyes on Richard.

When the answer came: “She is going to marry Montenera. I have seen for a long time he was in love with her. I did my best, lad. But she engaged herself to him last night,”—when he heard the actual words, it only seemed to him like the repetition of some old, old story he had known from the day of their second meeting.

“Ah,” he said, after a long pause, during which he had remained perfectly still, with his eyes fixed upon the window, “so it is Montenera she is going to marry? I did not know she knew him.”

“She has known him a long time.” Richard hesitated a moment. “Did she tell you nothing—nothing last night?”

“No.”

“I would have done anything to prevent this, dear old boy. I would have given anything. I—I told her so. I told her

I would engage to look after the prospects of the little fellow. But that was not enough. Gina will bend to no influence. She pretends to care vastly about my being the head of the house ; she pretends to be afraid of me," Richard continued, looking at his friend with his kind melancholy smile ; " she says she is afraid of me, and I cannot even get her to answer me a question. She grows more and more like my grandfather, and is neither to be bribed nor led."

" I know her better than you do," Nevil answered slowly. " In your place I should never have attempted to do either ; but I understand her better than you."

Even then, this idea gave him a sort of forlorn satisfaction. " She always said I understood her best," he murmured to himself between his teeth.

He remembered the look, the expression of her eyes as she raised her face to his and kissed him.

"I suppose you have nothing else to tell me, Richard?"

"Nothing else."

"Then I wish you would go away. I wish you would leave me alone," Nevil said.

Six—seven years had passed since that morning, bringing many unforeseen changes. In the year which followed this last definite ending of his hopes, Nevil made one of the most important acquaintances of his life. After twenty years of complete indifference, it suddenly occurred to him one day to go and call upon his aunt, Miss Marlowe, his father's only sister, and whom he remembered from having heard her vaguely alluded to by his elder brothers while he himself was a little child.

It was more than twenty years since Miss Marlowe had held any communication with her brother's family. "They quarrelled, she and the governor, over the interest of some mining shares. I remember

it perfectly well, for I was in the office at the time. She went off in a fury, swearing she would sink all her own money in an annuity rather than that a penny of it should ever come to my father; and the governor heard afterwards that she had done it, too. She is a bad-tempered, rude old woman; you'll make nothing out of her," Charles Marlowe said, to whom Nevil had applied for information. "I wrote to her myself when I married. I never saw any good come of refusing to recognize a respectable relation. And Jane wrote to her again about the time of Charlie's christening. But she never took any notice of either of us. There ought to be some law to restrict a woman from making away with so much property. It's scandalous, that's what I call it—scandalous! But you will make nothing out of her."

"Well, I don't know. I have a sort of fancy she and my poor mother were great friends."

“Ah, I’ve heard something about that. But—but it is an old story now,” said Charles, looking at his half-brother rather hard, and tapping the edge of his desk with his paper cutter. Lady Alicia had never been unkind to her husband’s plain, steady, elder sons ; she had simply never noticed them, except with a vague wonder when they seemed to know nobody at her parties. “And much good my aunt got out of the friendship—and the whole affair !” Charles thought to himself, wagging his head, and remembering old family stories.

“And I want nothing from her. Hang it all ! She can’t be more than rude to me,” Nevil said, “and the Lord knows *that* is no such new thing between members of our amiable family.”

The banker retorted rather shortly that he supposed their family was as amiable as most. And then he rubbed his fat white hand over the top of his head, where the

hair was already growing thin. "By the way, Nevil, you've grown such a dandy with all your swell friends, one hardly knows when to invite you; but Jane is going to have a little 'at home' on Monday—just a few selected friends—and if you could drop in some time in the course of the evening, and—and bring Lord Irwin——"

"Why, Jane might feel disposed to include me, too, among the 'respectable relations,' whom it is wise to recognize, eh, Charles? Well, all right. Jane is always friendly—when she thinks of it. Give her my love, and tell her I'll do my best to come."

"And bring Lord Irwin?"

"With his shield, or on it?" Nevil declared, with a wave of his stick and a good-humoured laugh. He generally contrived to be on friendly terms with *one* member at a time of his family.

Nevil laughed; but he was apt at times

to stick to his point in a way which astonished even those who knew him most familiarly. In all that he did, for good or ill, there was always a touch of this quality of surprise, of unexpectedness. In this case, a week had not passed before he found himself standing, with his hat in his hand, in the front drawing-room of a Brighton lodging-house, awaiting the entrance of his aunt.

She was a long time coming, and in the mean time he amused himself by examining her collection of fans, of which she had a great many, and some of considerable value. He was holding one of these in his hand and wondering at the curious way in which its ivory sticks were broken, as if snapped across by a blow, when the sound of a dress rustling made him suddenly start and turn his head.

Standing a dozen paces behind was a woman of between fifty and sixty, of extreme corpulence, and dressed from head to foot in black. She wore a black cap on

her hair, from under which her keen light-coloured eyes shone with an extraordinary brilliancy, like fine sharp points of steel. Her face might have been agreeable when she was younger; it had lost all its form now; and yet, in spite of this, in spite too of its expression of rough distrust, Nevil did not feel disposed to agree with his half-brother's verdict. His heart warmed in an instant towards his ancient kinswoman; he noticed at once that she was leaning heavily upon her stick, and he went up to her, holding out his hand,

"Well, aunt, I don't suppose you know me, but I am your nephew, Nevil," he said cordially.

At the first sound of his fresh young voice her hands began to tremble. She crossed the room without speaking, and went and seated herself upon the end of the small, hard lodging-house sofa.

"Yes, you are Nevil—come back. And what do you want of me, Nevil? I have

nothing to do with you—nothing to give you,” she said.

She spoke very quietly; but the young man was inexpressibly distressed to see her small bright grey eyes fill suddenly with tears, which did not fall, but remained stationary on her ample colourless cheek. There was something at once grotesque and yet pathetic in the incongruity between her appearance and her emotion.

“My dear Aunt Margaret,” he said, going up to her quickly, and taking one of her trembling hands in his, “surely you mistake me for some one else? I am Nevil Marlowe, your nephew Nevil, and my mother was your friend.”

“Alicia’s boy,” she said slowly, and still looking at him, “and so like—so like the same eyes, the same voice; his very way of speaking.”

She remained silent for fully a minute; and then she said, “Where are you staying, Nevil?”

He told her at which hotel.

"Go back there," she said, "and have your things packed. You are coming here to stay with me, in an hour from now. Remember, I do not want you before an hour!"

His hand was already on the door, when she called him suddenly back. "Why did you come?" she asked. "Who sent you? What made you come here, Nevil?"

Nevil turned rather red.

"No one sent me. I see what you mean—I ought not to have waited until now. But—but I have not very often heard you mentioned, aunt, I know nothing about you but your name. I am afraid I had no motive for coming but a mere whim, a caprice." He looked at her with his bright confident glance. "It will be different now that I know you," he said kindly.

"Ah!" she said, "it was a mere caprice, then, Nevil. It means nothing. It meant nothing then—all the time."

She was looking off into space with the expression of a person who recalls some far vision of the past. And presently her hands dropped upon her lap ; she began crying silently.

When he returned, which he did at the time indicated, and with singularly mingled sensations of compassion and curiosity, Miss Marlowe received him with no trace of her former emotion, nor, indeed, did he ever hear her make any allusion to it.

They dined together in a dull and spiritless sort of way, the third place at table being occupied by a faded young woman, who spoke in monosyllables, and wore a cairngorm ring on her hand. In the course of the evening, during which he was invited to play dummy whist with his aunt and the taciturn Miss Clay, Nevil's feelings of romantic pity became remarkably modified. He was quite prepared to bid his kinswoman good-bye as well as good night ; but at his first pleasant words of apology she cut him short.

“My brother must be singularly changed from what he was when I knew him, Nevil Marlowe, if he let you come here without warning you that what money I had went long ago to buy myself an annuity. You’ll get nothing here but the society of two ugly old women. I beg your pardon, Miss Clay; of one ugly old woman and one ugly young one. And yet I don’t think Alicia’s son would come on a begging errand.”

“My dear aunt!” said Nevil, feeling his face flush all over.

Miss Marlowe laughed. She laid her hand on the young man’s arm and looked into his eyes rather wistfully. “Stay a little while, my dear,” she said. “I am a bad-tempered old woman, but you must learn to put up with me. It’s quite possible; ask Clay. And I am very ill, Nevil. I am a very ill woman, and have not many people anxious to please me. My brother would say it was my own fault—that annuity, you know.” She looked at

him sharply, and then again her face softened. "I am a very ill woman. I have an incurable heart disease, and I cannot bear a shock. I am not strong enough. You startled me very much by coming in this afternoon. You are the very image of your uncle, Nevil, of poor Alicia's brother, Lord Kay, my dear—only Lord Kay was handsomer than you, handsomer than any Marlowe. He was killed at the battle of the Alma when he was three and twenty. And after his death it was discovered that he had engaged himself to some little girl down in the country, some parson's daughter of whom his family had never heard. He was a wild, attractive young fellow, who would never brook the smallest control. I remember we were all considerably astonished to hear of the engagement at the time," Miss Marlowe continued very calmly, and looking steadily at Nevil, without moving a muscle of her face. "He was very poor considering his rank,

and his family entertained—other views. That was the same year your mother died. And she and I were good friends, Nevil. And I should like to have you stay here a little longer, my dear.”

He stayed with her for nearly a week, and left promising very faithfully to come again. During that time, and for those few days, he had taken a great fancy to his old kinswoman. She would talk to him about his young mother by the hour, while he moved restlessly about the ugly room. Among other good-natured things he had offered to re-arrange her beautiful collection of fans ; he even began to mend one of them. After her death, the half-finished sticks were found in her drawer, labelled, “Broken by Nevil Dane, and half mended by Nevil Marlowe : left undone by both ;” and the words gave the new possessor a curious little pang of remorse. He really had intended to return to Brighton, but, as he said himself, other things had inter-

vened. In his careless easy fashion, he had forgotten a great deal about it; and his aunt never wrote to him. The first communication he had about her came from her lawyer, and was an invitation to attend her funeral in his double capacity of near relative and heir.

The threatened annuity had never been more than a threat, grimly persisted in for years by an embittered and suspicious woman. She was dead now, leaving him a fortune of between two and three thousand a year, in addition to several houses. The very house she died in had been hers, although it had been her caprice to speak of it and treat it as a mere temporary lodging. She left him this money; and before long, in the midst of all the gloom and depression, and wounded love and aching mortified pride, with which the young man could not but remember the treatment which he had suffered and the irremediable loss which Gina had en-

tailed upon him,—in the very midst of all these dark reflections, Nevil was surprised to find courage rally and hope re-awaken, and a whole new world of new pleasure and new interests spring up with his new sense of independence and ease. The wound was fatal, and yet so much had survived it! Possibly the hearts which recover such blows are not those most to be envied; and to be crippled for life—a poor consolation for not being dead. Yet, in time, and like other cripples, he acquired the habit of not resting too much weight upon what had been broken. He passed over life more lightly, and for a long time, indeed, it seemed as if his whole nature had grown less serious and less steadfast in consequence of this shattering blow. People are curiously unwilling to recognize frankly the accommodating capacities of a man's virtues. Nevil was faithful; but it is none the less true that faithfulness in love can co-exist with much selfishness. And indeed, for a time,

it seemed as if that very capacity for keen remembrance contained the fatal drop of bitterness which hurt all his life. For years after Gina's defection, the old habit of mind engendered by that early passion continued to assert itself in unexpected ways and places. He had loved one woman ; now he made love to many. His restlessness, his inconsequence, his inability to take any one else seriously, were more than half justified in his own eyes by a tacit but perpetual reference to that sense of disappointment in the quality of his experience, which had become an acknowledged part of his daily existence. He was not in the least unhappy ; but he accepted this chronic dissatisfaction with the net result of life as a kind of authorization to try further experiments.

Indeed, where life had struck him hardest, he proved only too ready to give Fate another chance ; and having seen his fortunes

engulfed before his eyes, he took to living like some shipwrecked sailor, with an exaggerated belief in the possibilities of to-morrow. And yet, what he looked for were only the possibilities of some fresh amusement. His whole criticism of life was based upon the assumption that no emotion should have the power to move him beyond a certain, easily fathomed, depth. In perfect good faith he held his capacity for credulity to be exhausted.

He had believed that all things were final. He had refused to reconsider them. He had shrunk persistently from testing the force of his dead and buried passion.—Now, as he lay on the bank in the moonlight, beside Richard, his hands clasped behind his head, staring up at the gaunt weather-beaten cross above him, at the stars, and the tranquil summer sky, he seemed to himself to have been looking back for years upon that past—that dying passion—as on

an ebbing sea, where the waves break and fall, fall and rise, in the old curves, with a show of the old force, and each lapses farther away than the last, never, never again to reach the shore.

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